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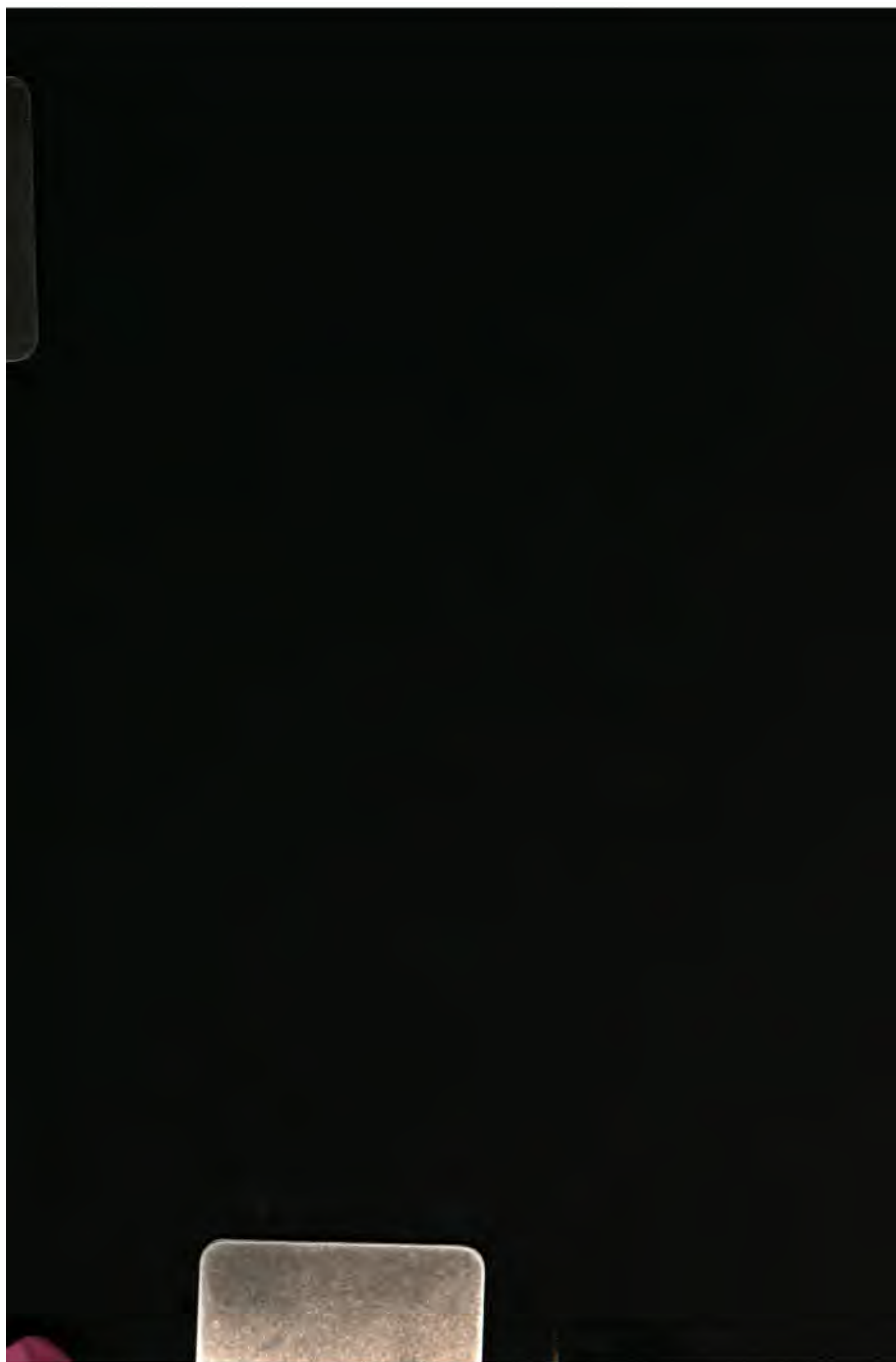
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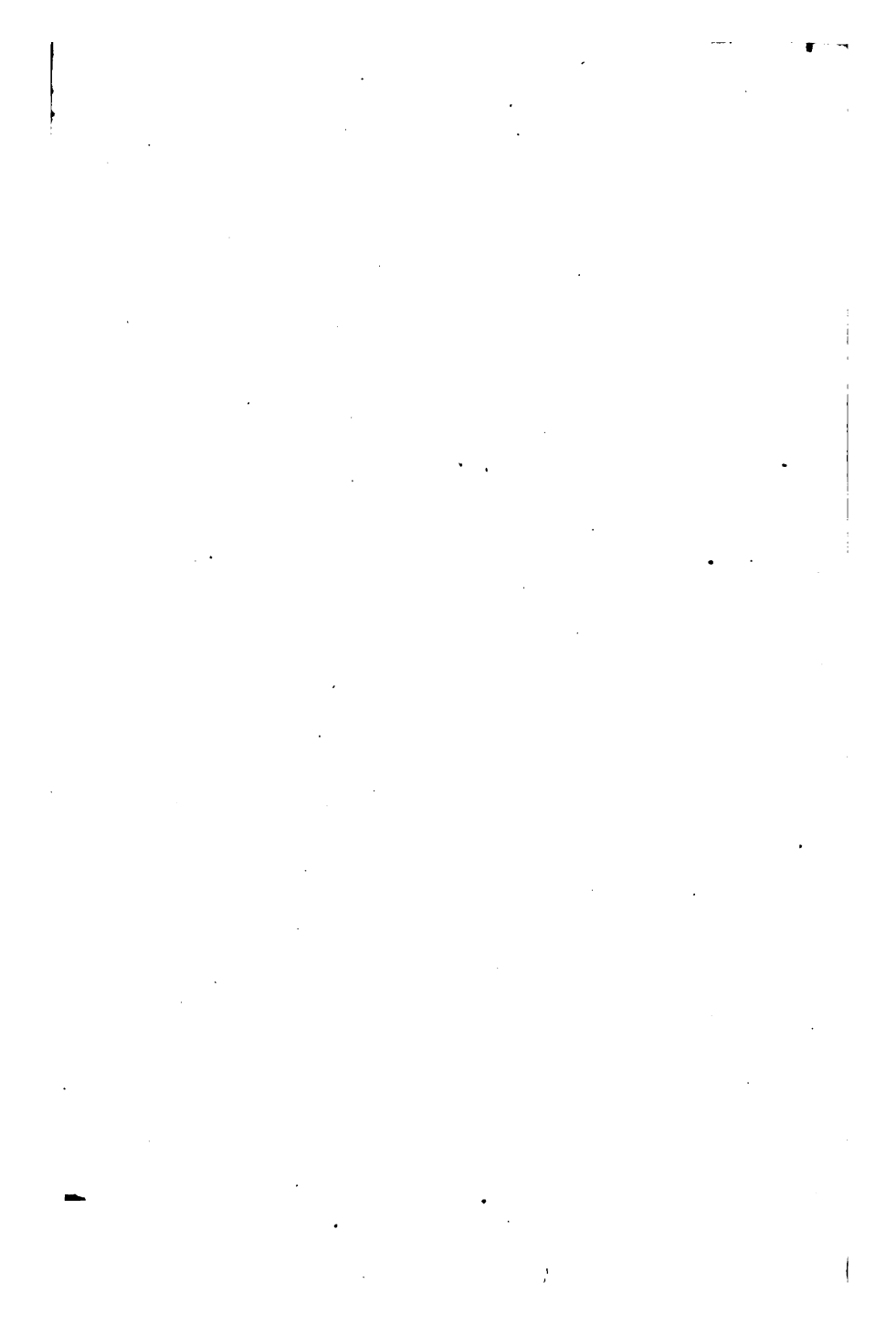
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BLUE FLAG AND CLOTH OF GOLD.

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"See," said Sam, as he wrote a label and set it up conspicuously on a split stick, "this tub contains turfy loam."—*Page 10.*

BLUE FLAG .
AND
CLOTH OF GOLD.

BY
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"THREE LITTLE SPADES," "STORIES OF VINEGAR HILL,"
"ELLEN MONTGOMERY'S BOOK-SHELF," ETC.

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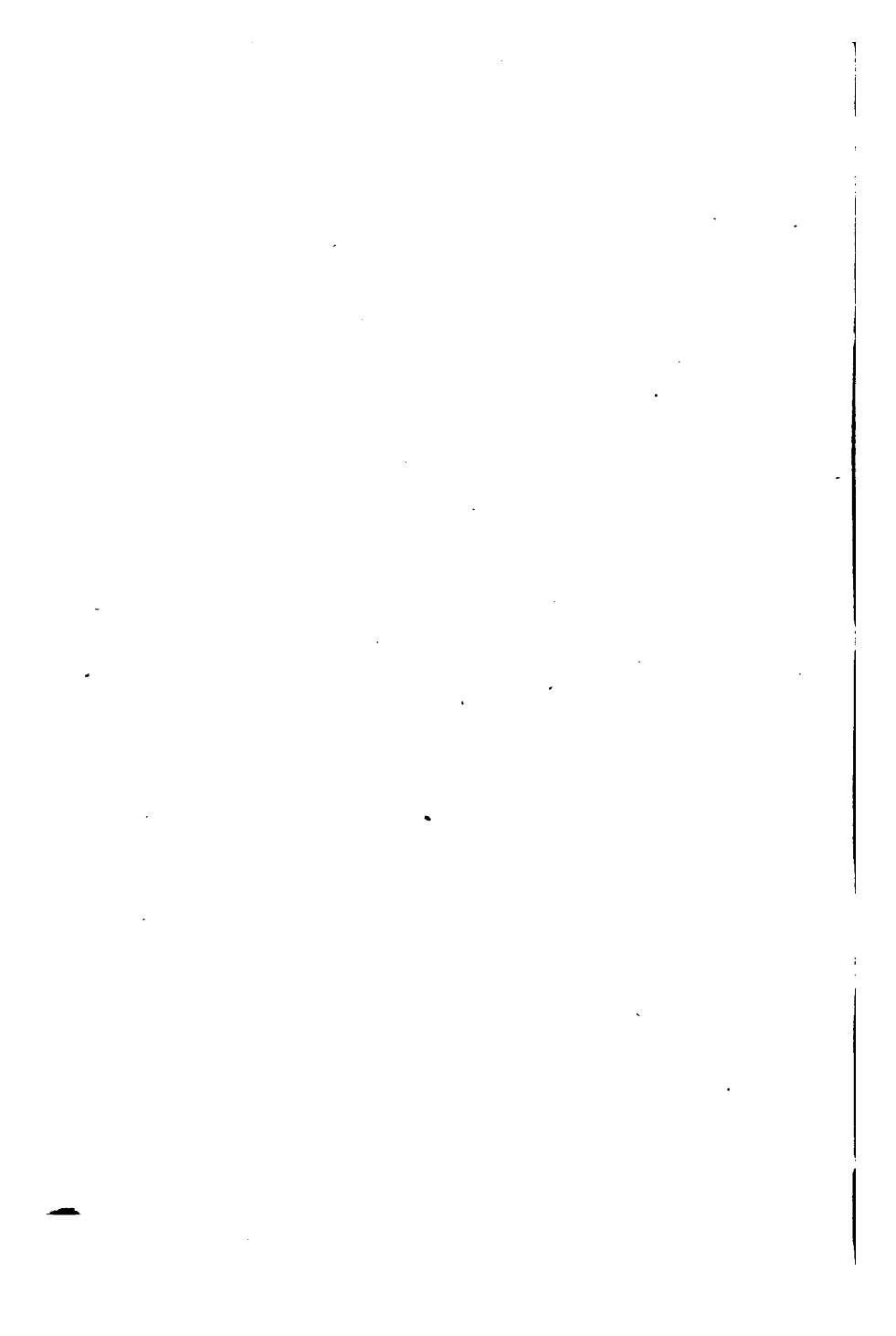
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TO THE CHILDREN.

IF this little book teaches you to love sweet things,
I shall be very glad. And if from it you may learn
to love the sweetest things that Clover knew, I
shall be more glad still.

MARTLAER'S ROCK, WEST POINT, N.Y.,
July 18, 1879.



BLUE FLAG AND CLOTH OF GOLD.



CHAPTER I.

"It does really seem," said Lily, "as if November would never come!"

"It will come long before another October does," answered Mrs. May.

"Yes, mamma, of course, and I like October too," said Lily condescendingly; "but I'm in such a hurry to plant our bulbs!"

"The bulbs are in no hurry."

"O mamma! do you really think they are not?" said the quiet Clover. "Why, one of Prim's crocuses has got a little white shoot, so long, already."

"Yes, and it sticks right out through the wrapping paper," said Prim. "I'm sure that one acts as if it was in a terrible hurry. It's my dark blue King William."

"You had better give King William an early chance, then, and mark him for winter blooming in

the house," said Sam. "And, by the way, have you all decided how many you will keep for the winter?"

"I haven't," said Lily. "What do you mean?"

"Winter blooming?" said Primrose; "I thought we were to have 'em in the spring?"

"You may, if you like that best," said Sam. "Or you may save out a few to make the bow window gay all winter."

"Oh, that will be delightful! we'll do that," said Clover. "But which would you keep out, Sam? Here's my list. I mean the list of mine."

"Let me see," said Sam, taking the neat slip of paper. "Ah, Clover's lists are as well kept as her garden! Well, all these little Van Thol tulips, in the first place. They are very early bloomers, and make a fine show in the house, though the larger kinds eclipse them out of doors."

"There are six of them," said Lily. "We've each got two."

"Very good," said Sam; "six tulips. Then each of you might keep out a hyacinth or two; and there should be one pot of snowdrops and one of crocuses, and one of scilla roots. That will make twelve pots in all; and if you add one polyanthus narcissus and one iris tuberosa, and a pot of double jonquils, you will have five pots apiece—quite enough to attend to in cold weather."

Lily clapped her hands and danced about the room.

"It's almost better than summer!" she said. "Oh, I wish November would come!"

"Sam, which names would you keep out?" said Clover, who stood still, though looking not a bit less pleased.

"Study your catalogue," said Sam, giving his old answer. "The names don't matter so much; but look and see which hyacinths Mr. Vick has marked as the best winter bloomers, and choose out those crocuses that seem in the most terrible hurry, as Prim says, to be planted. Then don't plant them quite all at once, but a few very early, and after a while the rest, so that they may bloom in succession and give you flowers all winter."

The children were greatly struck with the brilliancy of this idea, and stood silently looking forward to the far distant spring, through a perfect avenue of tulips, hyacinths, and jonquils.

"Plant some very early!" Lily suddenly exclaimed; "why, then, we needn't wait for November."

"You need wait for nothing but your own mental processes," replied Sam gravely.

"And you needn't talk stuff just because we're in a puzzle," Lily retorted.

"Well, Sam," said little Primrose, who had been

sedately eyeing the future, "wouldn't it have a good effect if we planted the whole of each thing at once?"

"It would have a very bad effect on a crocus root to divide it," said Sam.

"Ah, but," said Prim, "now, Sam!"

"So as to have a period of crocuses, she means," said Clover, who now and then indulged herself with a word of extra size. Sam laughed.

"My powers are not equal to questions of such extreme nicety as that," he said; "I really should not like to be counsel in the matter."

"But you can be judge," said Lily.

"Ah, so I can!" said Sam. "A most happy thought. And of course I can charge the jury. Ladies of the flower garden! The question is, whether there should be 'a period of crocuses,' an interval of snowdrops, an interregnum of hyacinths. The witnesses on the one side are the wild and impossible fancies and aspirations of the youthful mind, always ready to believe it can do what cannot be done. On the other, the clear, sensible instructions of Mr. Vick and his catalogue, standing firmly on the ground of that sublime maxim, 'What man has done, man may do.' Of course, women,—especially of course, children. You will proceed to weigh the evidence carefully, and then to forget which scale went down. Remember that this is October, and

that the winter is commonly three months long. Do not fail also to bear in mind that the outer world at that season is apt to be without 'a period' of anything except snow. If your bulbs bloom, there will be contrast; if they die, there will be harmony."

"Sam! Sam!" cried Lily, pinching him with both hands at once, "you wicked boy, they *won't* die."

"Do you think they *probably* will, Sam?" said little Prim, looking very grave.

"Be quiet, all of you," said Sam; "you interrupt the court. I recommend, therefore, successive plantings, for it is a well-established ~~fact~~ fact that where one won't, another will. Take into consideration also that some bulbs are in a hurry, others are not. The greatest variety and confusion will be secured by your all planting all sorts at once, while on the other hand, if you all plant different sorts at different times, the result will be a certain unity of effect and of competition. If, therefore, you prefer these, you will so decide; if the contrary, then otherwise. Here I rest the cause."

"Well, I should think you'd want to rest somewhere," said Lily; and they all clapped their hands, and danced round Sam, till he declared that what common sense he had left was going off in a whirligig.

"*I* vote for variety," said Lily. "I shall plant my polyanthus narcissus first."

"And I'll plant my crocuses," said Prim, "because I'm afraid to have King William wait."

"Well, then, *I'll* plant my dear little tulips," said Clover, "my Duke Van Thols."

"Then next," said Lily, "go the snowdrops."

"And my hyacinth," said Prim.

"And my iris tuberosa," said Clover; "then *my* hyacinth next, and last of all, the scilla roots."

"After the snowdrops, tulips; after them, the hyacinth," Lily went on.

"And my pot of jonquils, and then my two tulips," said Prim.

"I guess we'll have colour enough, any way we can fix it," said Lily. "O Sam, dear! when can we plant our first roots?"

"O Lily, dear!" answered Sam, "know, most importunate of damsels, that you can plant your first roots in precisely two hours and fifteen minutes from the present time."

"Why, Sam," cried Primrose, "how do you know?"

"It wants just fifteen minutes to dinner," said Sam,— "and two hours is but a reasonable allowance for dinner and preparations."

"Dinner!" said Lily,— "what's dinner to tulips?"

"Not much," said Sam, shaking his head; "but it's a good deal to tulip planters—also to overseers of the same. I've no mind to grow thin on hardy bulbs."

"Poor boy!" said Lily; "come along, then, and eat your dinner just as fast as you can, and let's be off."

"All in good time," said Sam; "I've got to expend this fifteen minutes in judiciously deciding what I will plant myself."

"And do you *really* care about dinner, then?" said Prim.

"I really do," answered Sam, laughing. "A 'crocus period' before it begins, is, to say the least, light support; and if the thing went on too long, Prim, even masses of colour might fail to restore me."

"We're not going to have masses of colour, you ridiculous child," said Lily; "didn't you understand? We're going to have variety."

"I understand!" said Sam. "I am to be regaled with the sad spectacle of one poor, forlorn polyanthus narcissus cast away between two tulips, and stared out of countenance by a procession of little upstart crocuses."

"It's not going to be between the tulips," said Lily, giving him a little reproachful tap on the shoulder.

"O Sam!" said Prim, "do you think my crocuses will be upstarts?"

"Why, you want them to start up, don't you?" said Sam, laughing and catching his little sister in his arms. "Of course, 'dark blue King William' must be every inch a king—what inches there are; and 'Sir Walter Scott' can never be anything but a chief. What 'Ne plus ultra' will turn out, I don't know, but I *guess*—as Lily says—it must be something very like my little Prim."

"Oh, 'Ne plus ultra' is a fine, light blue, with white tips," said Prim.

CHAPTER II.

HOWEVER he might talk, Sam was in truth about as ready as the children to make haste, having his own private packet of bulbs to plant. So instead of the long after-dinner debate with his father, which sometimes (as Lily declared) "eat up all the afternoon," Sam yielded at once to the beseeching little hands upon his arm, and followed Prim down to the winter playroom without a word.

"O Sam!" she cried joyfully, "I do believe you've arranged all the arrangements beforehand."

"I do believe I have," Sam answered, proceeding to separate the stacks of pots, and giving a critical inspection to the various tubs of material that stood about. "You see, chicks, I could have had the soil ready mixed beforehand, too, but I thought you had better do the compounding yourselves, to provide for some time when I am not here."

"Com-pounding," Prim repeated slowly; "do you always have to com-pound for hardy bulbs, Sam?"

"One has to compound for a good many things," said Sam, with a laugh.

"But she means all these tubs," said Lily.

"Well, all these tubs are not strictly essential; common garden soil will do if it's pretty good. But of course nothing will content us this time but 'the very highest results,' and for that we need a compost. See," said Sam, as he wrote a label and set it up conspicuously on a split stick, "this tub contains turfy loam."

"Where do you get that, to begin with?" said Clover.

"Turfy loam, my dear, is another word for decomposed sods, and you can get it from the roadside, or from an old pasture land, or from a heap that you made last spring."

"Oh! but we *didn't*," said Prim.

"Most true, and therefore *this* turfy loam comes straight from the pasture. The next tub has sand—sea sand, you perceive, and therefore ready at once for use. River sand would need a preliminary baking."

"Baking!" said Lily. "I never saw such a boy to talk in all my life."

"Baking," Sam calmly repeated; "to kill the small shell fish, which, *unless* baked, might feed on your bulbs. This tub contains leaf mould; this

has manure from the cow yard, so old and crumbly that it looks like mere rich earth. Now for your compost take three parts from tub 1, and one part each from tubs 2, 3, and 4, mix well, and go to work."

Which sage advice Sam enforced by example—seizing a trowel, an old pan, and a small wooden measure, and beginning to dip out and pour in and compound in great style. The children looked for a minute, then "fell in," and went at it with a will. Such dipping and counting, such painstaking, laborious work with the little trowels! Sam was at last driven to remind them that an afternoon of mere preparation would leave King William and his court as ill off as ever.

"The soil is mixed enough," he said. "Now choose your pots."

"How 'choose' them, Sam?" said Clover.

"Why, the right size and shape. Are your bulbs to be planted separately, or several together?"

"Dear me!" said Lily, straightening herself up, trowel in hand, "another question! I declare, there are more questions than bulbs. I shall put all mine separate, because I want just as many pots on my table as I can get."

"Very well," said Sam, "these tall, slender pots are the best. Bulb roots care more about working down than about spreading sideways."

"And shall we take the big pots for the big bulbs, and the little pots for the little ones?" said Prim.

"Something so," Sam answered, bringing an armful of bulb pots to where the children stood by their pans of compost. "Unless you like to plant several little ones together. Take a six-inch pot for a hyacinth, and a five-inch for a polyanthus narcissus. Here—you may use my rule, till you learn to know the size by sight."

"And take one of these wee, wee, little, little pots for my dark blue King William?" asked Prim.

"Well—perhaps, as King William is so *very* blue, he might have a pot to himself," said Sam. "But the snowdrops should be planted together—'massed,' we call it."

"I might mass the other crocuses," said Prim.

"I shall try both ways," said Clover. "Sam, dear, please don't talk just now—I want to think."

"So do I," said Sam, proceeding to fill pots and put in roots and stick in labels, with the most unthinking despatch.

"You fill the pot 'most full, and then you push the hyacinth down till it's 'most covered," said Primrose, watching him. "And then you give the

pot a good shake, and put in more earth, and a label."

"All correct and true, little sister," said Sam. "Cannot your small ladyship imitate so fair an example?"

"But he covers some of the roots all up," said Clover. "It's only the big fat bulbs that are left partly out."

"Some of the roots have no neck to be left out," said Sam; "and *they* must be covered up an inch or so."

"I should think you'd cover them all," said Lily. "Like potatoes."

"Only that potatoes are not hardy bulbs," said Sam. "Don't pack the earth down with your fingers—just give the pot a smart set-down on the table."

"What lovely work!" said Clover, the usual pink spots of pleasure coming into her cheeks.

"But what did you want to think about, Sam?" said little Prim, as she reluctantly covered up King William quite out of sight. "Oh, I wish crocuses had necks."

"Why, it requires some study," said Sam, "to know where all these flower-pots are to go when they are filled."

"Oh, I can tell you that," said Lily. "Mamma

said we might have the whole bow window. There are two sides for you, and one for each of us."

"But meanwhile?" said Sam.

"What's 'meanwhile'?" said Lily. "I mean now, right off."

"Exactly," said Sam—"and I don't."

"Then what *do* you mean, Sam, dear?" said little Prim, stopping short in her work, with the last crocus held fast in her small fingers.

"Why, chick," said Sam, bending down to kiss the earnest face, "if you were to put your bulbs up in the bow window at once, you would probably have no flowers at all. It would be like dressing you up for a young lady and sending you out into the world, before you have learned geography."

"Now, Sam," said Lily, "you're just fooling us."

"Not at all," said Sam.

"I notice," said Clover, with her thoughtful air, "that Mr. Vick recommends putting them in the cellar for a while, till the roots form."

"Till the roots form," Lily repeated, holding up one of her hyacinths, a large, solid, splendid-looking bulb; "well *I* should say they were pretty well formed already."

"The fibrous roots," Sam explained,— "the long, white threads by which the plant takes in its nourishment from the earth. See—look on the

under side, and you will find they are already starting."

"Then I don't see what's the use of the cellar," said Lily, "if they come out without it. Upstairs we could have the fun of watching them."

"Sam, dear," said Prim, "how long must they *stay* in the cellar?"

"Three or four weeks," said Sam; "or you may leave them seven, if you prefer."

"Seven!"

"Three or four!" echoed the children in different tones of dismay.

"I prefer to have mine upstairs at once," said Lily.

"But, Sam, *after* three or four weeks, what then?" said Clover.

"Then," said Sam, "you bring your potted bulbs into a warm room (not too warm), a few at a time, and give them all the sunshine they want to eat, and all the water they want to drink; and *then* you find that patience has its reward."

"I wish the cellar was upstairs," said Prim, rather dolefully.

"A cool, dark closet will do almost as well," said Sam, "but there are mice in our closets, Prim, and mice wouldn't leave dark blue King William a hair of his head."

"He shan't go in the closet," said Prim with decision; "but the cellar stairs are so steep!"

"I'll carry you down once a day," said Sam; "will that do? Every morning after breakfast we'll go down and take a look."

"You are certainly the best boy that ever was," said Prim, wrapping her big brother in a very small and earnest embrace. "That will do splendidly, Sam."

"I am going to try experiments," said Lily, "you know that's the way great discoveries are often made. Maybe Mr. Vick didn't care about having them in the parlour at once, and so never tried."

"Having what?" said Sam; "discoveries?"

"Bulbs," said Lily.

"Ha! maybe not!" said Sam with an air of extreme derision. "I'm too poor in hyacinths to try experiments myself, Lily, but I shall be extremely happy to look on."

"Well, I shall try," said Lily, "and then when my hyacinths are all in bloom before one of yours has come out of the cellar, *then* you'll see. Wouldn't it be fun to write to Mr. Vick about it!"

"I hope it won't be the busy season when you write," said Sam. "The first tidings of such a revolution of the laws of nature might distract his mind."

"Sam," said Prim, quite awestruck with Lily's daring, and yet a little fascinated too, "what will become of her bulbs if she does so?"

"I'll show you when we get down cellar," said Sam. "Now, you other girls who are not trying experiments, listen once more to directions. Fill your pots nearly full; press the hyacinth down till it is almost hidden in the earth; shake the pot to firm the earth, adding a little more if need be; water them thoroughly; stick in your label."

"But how do you manage to shake the earth?" said Prim, who with a large flower-pot in her small hands was making it describe very slowly many gyrations through the air. Sam laughed heartily.

"Shake it so, mouse," he said, taking the pot and giving it a smart "set-down" once or twice on the table. "Now water them all thoroughly, and we are ready for the cellar."

"Oh dear!" said Prim. "I wish they needn't go down there."

"Well, *I* shall keep some of mine upstairs, as I told you," said Lily. "Now this hyacinth—look, it's got quite a green shoot already. It's ridiculous to put it down in the dark. The rest may go, if you like."

"*I* don't like," said Sam. "I have nothing to do

in the matter but to take down what I am requested to take down."

"Please take mine, then, dear Sam," said little Prim. "I don't want 'em to wait a minute, because I want 'em back so much."

"Here goes, then," said Sam, stowing away Prim's flower-pots in a basket. "'Minute by minute hours are made.' Now, Crocuses, do your duty!"

So saying he carefully shouldered the basket, and bidding the children stay where they were, he carried that down first, and then came back for Prim. The others followed.

"How can they grow in the dark so?" said Clover, looking round the cellar. "Sam, you are choosing the very darkest place of all."

"Surely," said Sam. "It is quite too light near the windows. You know we want them to grow underground, not above it, just now. And besides, all the hanging shelves over there are full."

"Well, we don't want hanging shelves," said Lily; "there's room enough on the ground."

"I do," said Sam. "I cannot afford to plant bulbs for the sole benefit of the mice."

"You don't really mean," said Clover, "that the mice would *eat* them, Sam?"

"Just that, my wise little sister," replied Sam,

as he took the pots from the basket and set them up on a high hanging shelf.

"But, O Sam!" said Primrose, with her voice full of tears at the prospect, "*I never* can see them up there! And I can't watch them, or tell how they're growing!"

"You needn't put any of mine up there, thank you," said Lily. "I want a little fun as I go along."

"But the mice, Lily!" said Clover, who had carried on the struggle in her own mind silently, as usual.

"I'll manage them," said Lily, rummaging about. "Here's loads of room up on this bottom shelf by the stairs. It's even higher than the hanging shelf."

"But near the stairs," suggested Sam.

"*Do* you suppose mice are going to trouble themselves to scramble up those steep steps after hyacinths?" said Lily. "Why, it's as much as Prim herself can do."

Sam made no answer to that, but having set all his own pots on the shelf, he stood back and waited for orders.

"Put up mine too, please, Sam," said Clover with great resolution. "I'm sure it's best."

"And mine—O Sam!" said little Primrose, "do you advise me to put *all* mine up there, dear?"

"I do—if you want me to answer truly," said Sam, folding the beseeching little hands in his own.

"Then let 'em go," said Prim, with the air of a martyr. "And I'll just keep a potful of patience upstairs, out of the corner in my garden, you know, Sam."

Sam laughed a little, but I think his eyes gave another answer to Prim's words too. Very quick and carefully he set her treasures up on the shelf, and then lifted up Prim herself, that she might see how they looked.

"And we'll come every day after breakfast," said the little girl, laying her head down on top of his, as she gazed fondly at the red flower-pots.

"Every day. Can I do anything for you, Lily?"

"No, thank you," said Lily; "I suppose people had better try their own experiments—and I'd rather, besides."

Sam shook his head a little at that, but said nothing; then suddenly carried Prim off to another part of the cellar, which was very light.

"Look here," he said, giving a kick to an old basket that lay on the floor. It was full of long green stems or shoots, a foot long or more, that twisted and fell about and lay flat, in the most helpless manner. Then, as Sam stirred the basket, Prim thought she saw round roots among the long

green tops—roots that looked something like her beloved hyacinths.

“More hardy bulbs?” she cried.

“More hardy bulbs!” said Sam, giving the basket another contemptuous kick. “Hardy bulbs that have been neglected, and had their own way, and lived in the light before they were ready for it. Hardy bulbs that tried to grow and have a top without the trifling precaution of having roots first. Beautiful, aren’t they?”

“Why, Sam,” said Clover, laughing, “they are nothing in the world but onions.”

“Well, if onions aren’t hardy bulbs, *I* don’t know what are—that’s all,” said Sam, setting off with Prim at such a run that the others never caught him till he got to the top of the stairs.

“Now remember,” he said, turning round on the landing-place, “you children are not to go climbing about down there by yourselves. Lily’s shelf, of course, is within easy reach of everything, and one doesn’t like to interfere with science; but nobody must climb up to the hanging shelf, without my permission.”

“And what will they do for water, Sam?” said Clover. “If you are away any time, I mean.”

“Won’t want any,” said Sam. “In such a cool, damp place, one soaking will last till they begin to

grow." And Sam set Prim down upon her own feet, and turning round gave his undivided attention to what Lily was about. One by one she brought her flower-pots and set them on the shelf by the stairs, while the other two children looked wistfully on. It did seem such a splendid place! There, where she could reach them herself, and watch them from day to day. Prim glanced up in Sam's face to see if there were any signs of his relenting, but not one. Sam was as grave as a judge, and as unmoved. And when Lily took up the last two pots and carried them triumphantly to the full sunshine of the bow window, Prim could not quite keep back a small sigh.

"How pretty they look, Sam, dear, don't they?" she said, squeezing her brother's fingers with a mute appeal for sympathy.

"Very pretty," was Sam's reply. "But now, Prim, I'll tell you a secret: there will never be anything else pretty about them, except the pots!"

Prim was greatly shocked at this dark whisper, and felt it her duty afterwards to tell Lily. But Lily only laughed.

CHAPTER III.

OCTOBER hurried away quite fast enough—that beautiful October, with its blue skies, and red leaves and wonderful winds all full of the wild sweetness of the woods. Even Lily forgot her impatience and was willing to have time wait a little; and Clover petted her late roses, and Prim gathered her last ipomeas with fingers that were even more loving than usual. The white frosts lay thicker and thicker every morning as the month went on, but seemed to make the midday air only the more balmy; and the little house crickets were everywhere arranging their winter quarters, and the green katydids lay lifeless on the walk, slain by the biting frost.

“The ground is getting cleared for our bulbs, fast,” said Sam, as he came in one morning.

“O Sam!” said Clover—“cleared! When it is geraniums and mignonette and verbenas you are talking of!”

“True, little sister!” said Sam, kissing her. “But

all the same, the ground *has* to be cleared, and I'd rather have the frost do it, than do it myself."

"Suppose it didn't freeze," said Lily, "what then?"

"Then," said Sam, "we should have to keep special beds for bulbs and bulbs only, or else cut out new ones every year. Papa says I may have that old sand-patch of weeds this year for mine."

"You poor Sam!" said little Primrose. "You shall have half of my ground, dear."

"No, I shall not, dear," said Sam, laughing. "Nobody need waste pity on me—I shall beat you all with that sand-patch, yet."

"Oh, may we see you?" said Clover.

"See me beat you? With pleasure."

"No, but I mean see you work at the patch," said Clover.

"To be sure you may. I am going at it the first thing after dinner. No, the second thing," he added, with a glance at the faces. "I shall dig all your bulb beds first." And from the sigh of relief that escaped Prim's lips, Sam knew that her face at least he had read aright.

"I'll take down the catalogue and read it to you while you're digging," said Lily, "in case you forget!"

To which politeness Sam replied, ungratefully, that it would be much more to the purpose if she

were to arrange her own ideas about the planting.

"I know how it will be," he said. "Just when I get in the midst of my own digging, up to my eyes in plans and work, you'll forget every single thing you meant to do. 'Sam, dear, would you put pink, or blue, in the middle?' 'Sam, how much is four inches?' 'O Sam! where's my trowel, and the labels, and everything else?' While Prim will put on a long face and request to know again whether she must cover the crocuses quite up!"

"Well, I must, I s'pose," said Prim, clasping her little fingers round the hands that held her. "But it *would* be nice if I could leave 'em a little bit out, just so I could see 'em, Sam."

"Just so Jack Frost could bite 'em," said Sam. "You must consider the subject from that side."

It was great work to prepare those beds, and a good deal of work, too. There was so much "summer rubbish," as Lily called it, to clear away, before the digging could even begin. Dead balsams, and frozen tuberoses stalks, and zinnias dressed in their brown mourning, and the trimmings of geraniums and other things that had been taken up. Then there were dead leaves blown down from the trees, and not a few lively weeds that stood bright and strong on the ground where

their betters had fallen. Lily, certainly, had summer rubbish enough.

But Clover's bed was as clean and delicately cared for as if it had been mid-summer instead of mid-fall. The roses were tied up, and the seedy stalks of mignonette and alyssum were clipped away, and Clover's scarlet verbena was brilliant yet, and the one chrysanthemum (her particular pet and pride) was in a glory of white blossoms. A few red oak leaves had, indeed, fluttered down during the night and taken possession, scattering themselves about, but they were soon raked off; and Clover stood surveying her garden with loving eyes. Sam smiled as he looked from it to Lily's.

"And what state are you in, little Prim?" he said, turning away towards her quarter. "You small bit of spring among all these fall doings."

"Look!" cried Prim excitedly; "O Sam! my heartsease are bigger than ever!"

"Ay, truly," said Sam, stooping down by the little girl, as her fingers lifted one sonsy pansy face after another, the richest purple, the purest yellow, and some that were almost mahogany colour, and some that were almost black; with crimson and blue and gold-edged. "Why, Prim, the summer bloom was not a circumstance to this!"

"But *why?*" queried Prim. "Everything else dies all up."

"Oh, not *everything*," corrected Clover.

"Well, 'most," said Prim; "and it's all cold now and frosty."

"Yes," said Sam, leaning his head down upon the tossing curls that had seen so few summers; "shows it's the true kind. That's the way with heartsease, Prim."

"Well, it's good it is," said Primrose, lifting up another blossom and gazing fondly into its wide-open eyes. "Oh, you perfect little beauty! You see, Sam, my geranium is taken up, and my ipomea is"——

"Taken down," suggested Sam, with a glance at the brown tatters of the summer curtain that had hung about the bow window—not a blossom left, nor a fresh leaf.

"Poor ipomea!" said Primrose tenderly. "Only it isn't 'grandiflora superba' now, at all. And you see, Sam, mamma wouldn't let me work out in the wet; and it's rained so much, and I'm afraid there are some weeds, Sam."

"I'm afraid there are," said her brother frankly. "But there won't be after I've dug them up. Ah, there comes Roger with my load of manure! Now, chicks, out of the way!"

And as Lily remarked, "if they had never known Sam was a smart boy before, they should have found it out now." It was no easy thing to dig those beds, because there were so many plants in the way that must not be disturbed. How Sam contrived to cover all the empty places with the rich black stuff from the wheelbarrow, without at the same time quite smothering the pansies and pinks and petunias that had dared to live so far on towards cold weather; and then how he made out to dig it all in, and stir up the ground a good foot deep, and yet not cut off the roots of all such venturesome little plants—that was a great wonder.

"But I don't see why you dig it so deep," said Lily. "Do you know what little things my bulbs are, Sam?"

"I do, Lily. Do you know what long roots they have?"

"Roots?" said Lily. "Why, they're roots themselves."

"But with no working roots at present, and until they get working roots, they will have nothing to show; but when the bundle of long white fibres has grown out from the bulb, working down and through the rich earth, then will come up the gay flowers and the shining leaves."

"It is very beautiful!" said Clover. "How

many ways plants have, Sam! How many kinds there are!"

"Ay," said her brother; "'out of the ground made the Lord to grow every tree that was pleasant to the eyes and good for food.' Now, Prim, your bed is done. Plant wisely, and have a good time!"

"She'll be sure to take time enough," said Lily, as Primrose fell at once into a happy attitude which spoke of anything in the world but hurry. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if I had every one of my bulbs planted before Prim even begins."

"But what did you mean by 'planting wisely,' Sam?" said his little sister.

"Not rashly," said Sam. "Having due regard to the fitness of things. It is not 'wise,' Prim, to plant the low ones behind and the tall ones in front; nor to bury a crocus as deep down as a hyacinth; nor to leave the places unmarked, and so perhaps set one bulb on top of another."

"Oh dear," said Primrose, "I wish I was wise! Sam, it'll be *dreadful* if I make mistakes!"

"I don't wish you were wise," said her brother laughing. "Lay Mr. Vick's catalogue open by you on the border, and go ahead. He knows enough for two."

So Prim laid the catalogue out carefully on the grass edging at her side with a stone on it to baffle the wind, and took her basket of bulbs in one hand

and her little trowel in the other, and at once wandered off into dream-land. Sam finished up the other two little gardens, and then went to work at his own new bed; and everything was very still for a while. You could hear Lily humming to herself over her work, and the quick, steady strokes of Sam's spade; but Clover and Primrose were far too deep for either singing or talking.

Clover went into the matter in earnest. She had made a careful list of her bulbs, each name with a short description attached, so that she knew exactly which hyacinth was blue and which was red, and which was high and which was low; which tulips were single and early, and which were double and late. Then choosing some particular spot in the bed, and deciding, it might be, to plant there a group of five hyacinths, she ran over her list, to select five that she thought would go well together and set each other off. Then the five were picked out of her basket, and still in their labelled wraps of paper were laid out on the bed at the proper distance apart. Clover's neat little measuring stick figured about a good deal just here. There they lay, labels up, plump and round, and waiting. So Clover studied them, tried to imagine, altered and altered again the arrangement, looked, considered, and finally set them in carefully five inches deep, the

tallest in the middle, with a neat wooden label stuck in by each, and the most exact distance kept between. She measured the depth of the hole too, and then filled up and smoothed over, with the pink spots of pleasure growing deeper and deeper in her cheeks. The little cast-off wraps of paper were laid smoothly in one corner of her basket, and then Clover was ready for a patch of tulips.

Lily studied too, but after quite a different fashion. She hummed and sang and looked at her ground and made remarks to herself, and asked questions and answered them; then furiously scooped out several holes of somewhat uncertain depth, and thrust in the red, white, and blue with small ceremony and nothing at all of Clover's loving touch. Or she peered into her basket, and decided which names she liked best to plant together; making fancy arrangements, with high-sounding titles; "King Pepin and his Court"—wherein went all the dukes and princes. Or "Women's Rights,"—represented by such meek hyacinths as "Penelope" and "Anna Maria." In such cases, besides the separate "personal" labels, as she called them, each planted spot had its own general title on a tall stick. Sam smiled now and then as he glanced towards his three sisters, but he had no chance to show his own style of planting that night. By the time his new bed was ready the sun was down.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHERE is Prim?" said Mr. May, as he took his seat at the tea-table.

"Oh, she was for ever planting her bulbs, and so now she's washing her hands," said Lily.

"Natural sequence of events," said Mr. May. "Well, Prim, I understand you are 'happy and dirty' no longer."

"Papa, I was not very dirty," said Primrose, going round to her place. "But the dust will creep through my gloves a little."

"But you were very happy, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Primrose with a long breath. "Only it was such hard work."

"Hard work! How much do your hyacinths weigh apiece, I desire to know?"

"Oh, they don't *weigh* much," said Prim. "It's the *arrangement*, papa."

"Weight of ideas," said Mr. May. "How is it with you, Lily?"

"I'm tired enough," said Lily. "Pulling up

weeds, and planting, and then digging up—I guess I altered some of mine ten times.”

“Very hard work, I should call that,” said Mr May.

“I didn’t alter, papa,” said Primrose. “That was why I was so long,—thinking beforehand. It was so difficult!”

“How?” said Mr. May. “Enlighten me, Prim. I am not learned in bulb planting.”

“Papa,” broke in Lily, “she was just dreaming the whole time!”

“I am rather partial to dreams of some sorts,” said her father. “Well, Prim?”

“You see, papa, there is a great variety among hyacinths.”

“Is there? Variety of colour, do you mean?”

“Oh, not only that,” said Primrose, “but there are so many shades! And I couldn’t tell, papa, whether my dark red Duchess of Richmond would look best at the *back* of the group, and the light red Tuba Flora in front, or whether the Duchess ought to be in front.”

“I should have been puzzled myself,” said Mr. May, his eyes twinkling a little.

“Because both of ’em were tall,” said Primrose gravely. “And I had put Mars in another place.”

“Not all by himself?”

"Oh no, papa,—there's La Cherie, and Lord Anson, and another hard name."

"And were the tulips equally difficult?"

"I haven't planted my tulips yet," said Primrose.

"It took so long to find a place for Triumph Blandina, that I had to stop."

"Where does Triumph Blandina repose at last after all her fatigues?"

"Between Charles Dickens and Bleu Mourant, papa."

"Tragedy and comedy!" remarked Mr. May.

"Well, I didn't have any such fuss as that," said Lily. "And mine are all planted, and labelled, and done!"

"And yours, Clover?" said her father.

"Nearly all mine are planted, papa."

"Were *you* very happy, my dear?" said Mr. May, looking now at his eldest daughter with observant eyes.

"Yes, papa, very!" said Clover. "It is very interesting; one thinks of so many things."

"What does one think of—besides bulbs?" said Mr. May, helping himself to a piece of sponge cake.

"Papa—they show for so little," said Clover. "Just those small, round, brown things—and they're all full of beautiful wonders. Sam says they'll have long white fibrous roots, and then the leaves and

the flowers. And it is such a *great* wonder that they *should* be so different," she added softly. "They look alike, or almost alike."

"And to think that when the Lord said, 'Let the earth bring forth abundantly,' hyacinths and tulips came up at His word."

"Did they?" said Lily. "Sam, what does 'tall' mean, for a hyacinth?"

"Six feet," volunteered Jack.

"Be quiet," said Lily. "Nobody asked you anything, and nobody ever would, if they thought with me."

"Nobody will ever think with you," said Jack, "because you never think at all."

"Wait till you catch up with my thoughts, and see," said Lily. "Well, Sam."

"Jack is only five feet out of the way," said Sam. "Pretty moderate for him."

"Well, Clover," said Mr. May, "what are the rest of your wonders? First, that looking alike, and planted in the same earth, the bulbs should send up such different coloured flowers. What next?"

"They stay in the ground so long, papa! What are they doing, and how do they do it?"

"Clo," said Jack, "you'll be an old woman before your time. Papa, don't tell her, please. The

hyacinth is a phænogamus, endogenous, monocotyledonous plant of the petaloideous division. That is enough for her to know."

"How did you know it, pray?" said his father, laughing, while Prim's eyes opened wide and Lily exclaimed—

"I know! I know! he don't know a bit, papa—not that nor anything else. He's got it all written down on his cuff!"

"Not in ink?" said Mrs. May in slight horror, whereupon Jack, catching sight of her face and the idea at once, choked himself with delight—and his muffin—to a quite alarming extent.

"Papa, what *are* they really?" said little Primrose, when quiet came back once more.

"They—your bulbs? Underground stems, my dear—I believe that is what the botanists call them." And Mr. May finished his cup of tea, and quitted the subject and the room. Primrose sat silent and sober.

"Mamma," she said at last, "must I call my bulbs underground stems? It's very ugly."

"I shall never call mine so, I promise you," said her mother. "The one name belongs to them just as much as the other."

"It is very ugly!" Prim repeated. "I thought they were roots, not stems."

"Come here, little Prim," said her oldest brother, "and sit on my lap, and let me read you some pretty words about these same underground stems. I should only spoil the story if I told it in my own words. Now, open your ears and understand :

"Perennials are plants which live on year after year. Shrubs and trees are of course perennial.

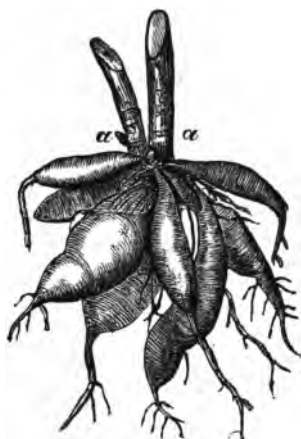


FIG. 1.—*Dahlia* Roots.

So are many herbs ; but in these only a portion generally survives. Most of our perennial herbs die down to the ground before winter ; in many species all but certain separate portions underground die at the close of the year ; but some parts

of the stem containing buds are always kept alive to renew the growth for the next season; and a stock of nourishment to begin the new growth with is also provided. Sometimes this stock is laid up in the roots, as for instance in the peony, the dahlia (fig. 1, p. 37), and the sweet potato. Here some thick roots filled with food made by last year's vegetation, nourish in spring the buds (*a, a,*) on the

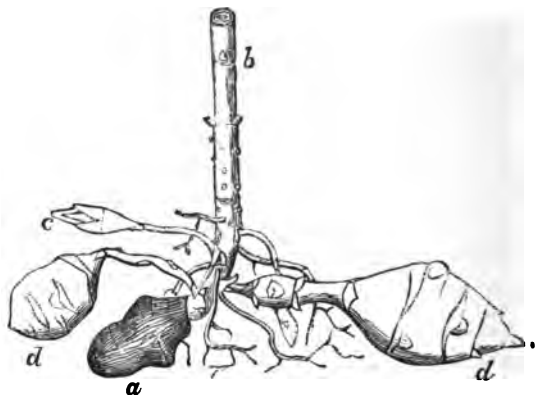


FIG. 2.—*Ground Artichoke.*

base of the stem just above, enabling them to send up stout leafy stems, and to send down new roots, in some of which a new stock of food is laid up during summer for the next spring, while the exhausted old ones die off; and so on, from year to year. Sometimes this stock of food is laid up in

particular portions of branches of the stem itself, formed underground, and which contain the buds—as in the ground artichoke and the potato. Here these parts, with their buds, or eyes, are all that live over winter. These thickened ends of stems are called tubers. In fig. 2, *a* is a tuber of last year now exhausted and withering away, which grew in spring by one of its buds to make the stem *b*, bearing the foliage of the season. This sends out some branches underground, which in the course of the season thicken at the end as they receive a stock of nourishment prepared by this year's foliage, and become new tubers (*c*, a forming one; *d*, *d*, well-grown tubers of the season) to live over winter and make the next year's growth. Because they are underground, these tubers are commonly supposed to be roots; but they are not, as any one may see. Their eyes are buds, and the little scales behind the eyes answer to leaves, while roots bear neither buds nor leaves.' " *

"But, Sam!" said little Primrose, looking quite sober with the effort to cram herself full of knowledge, "I'm not planting potatoes."

"Finally," said Sam, flourishing over a leaf of his book, "'the nourishment for the next year's growth may be deposited in the leaves themselves. Some-

* Gray's "How Plants Grow." Cuts from same.

times it occupies all the leaf, as in the house leek and other fleshy plants. Here the close ranks of the thickened leaves are wholly aboveground. Sometimes the deposit is all in the lower end of the leaf, and on the ground, or underneath, as in common bulbs.' "

"Common bulbs!" repeated Lily,— "what a way to talk!"

"Take a white lily of the gardens,'" said Sam,



FIG. 3.—*Bulb and Lower Leaves of Lily.*

bowing to her, "'for example, in the fall or in spring, before it sends up the stalk of the season (fig. 3). From the bottom of the bulb, roots descend into the soil to absorb moisture and other matters from it, while above it sends up leaves to digest and convert these matters into real nourishment. As fast as it is made, this nourishment is carried down to the bottom of each leaf, which is enlarged

or thickened for containing it. These thick leaf bases or scales, crowded together, make up the bulb; all but its very short stem, concealed within, which bears these scales above, and sends down the roots from underneath. Every year one or more buds in the centre of the bulb grow, feeding on the food laid up in the scales, and making the stalk of the season, which bears the flowers!'"

"Oh, let me have it a little while, please," said Clover, as Sam closed his book. "I want to study it all out."

"I don't," said Lily; "they're my dear bulbs, and that's enough."

CHAPTER V.

Of course nothing could be spoken of or thought of, that evening, but bulbs. The children, grouped together at one corner of the fireplace, talked over plants and planting and probabilities, without growing much the wiser thereby, except when they could draw Sam in for a few minutes, and get a word or two from him. But to-night Sam was particularly busy with his studies, and must not be interrupted; so their only chance was when he came to the fire for a minute, to throw on a fresh stick or arrange the fallen brands. Even then his answers were brief. But the children were too utterly happy not to have a gay time, though Sam was busy, and they themselves obliged to speak softly, and not interrupt the reading or the conversation that went on around the table. An irrepressible little laugh every now and then rippled forth; and Mrs. May smiled, and Mr. May glanced over at the chimney-corner with a well-pleased face; and nobody felt at all interrupted, even though the laugh

broke in upon Sam's problem, bringing no solution. Only Jack, rather hard up just then in Latin, indulged himself (under his breath) with a somewhat emphatic—

"Bother the girls! If I don't pay 'em off!"—

With which fierce threat, Jack buried himself once more in his dictionary, and all was quiet again.

"Happy children," said Mr. May at last; "happy children that have bulbs! It quite makes me sorry for the young ones who have none."

"We didn't have any last year, papa," said Prim.

"True," her father answered. "I had forgotten there were such things as hardy bulbs in existence."

"But we never were so happy in all our lives before," said Lily; "not half so happy, papa; not a quarter!"

"Really?" said Mr. May, laughing. "Can a certain quantity of bulbs produce such an uncertain quantity of happiness? At that rate, I should order hyacinths by the bushel, and give them away broadcast. What are you reading, Clover?" for Clover's eyes sometimes, and sometimes her forefinger, still kept the place whence Sam had read the strange story of sweet potatoes and hyacinths.

"It is 'How Plants Grow,' papa; all about underground stems, you know."

"Science, too," said Mr. May.

"Papa," said Lily, "*I* say they are bulbs."

"I shall not contradict you, my dear! they are, unquestionably."

"But I mean, papa, they're *not* stems."

"Well," said her father, laughing a little, "I shall not contradict you there either. We hope that time and sense may do that."

"What do you mean, papa?" said Lily, just a trifle mortified.

"Why, my dear," said Mr. May, "when people refuse to learn in the ordinary ways, we generally commit them to the teaching of time and sense; time as it passes, and sense as it grows."

"It'll be about the toughest job time and sense ever had, in this case," remarked Jack.

"Put that sentence back into Latin, and keep it there," said Mr. May; and then he took up his paper again, and the children went on with their talk; only in Clover's mind one little set of words kept running back and forth like so many mice. "Happy children that have bulbs!" Then what about all the rest? There must be, evidently, a great many children without these indispensable things; and to Clover just now, hardy bulbs seemed among the things one must have. She thought over all the children of her acquaint-

ance,—at some places there were great gardens, and of course bulbs. At others the children might have, if they chose, for there was money enough. But poor people! and with great suddenness there walked into Clover's thoughts the pale face and meagre figure of little Dick Nobody. Could it be supposed that a bulb ever found its way to his hands—hands that were not often well filled with bread?

"O girls," cried Clover hastily, "which would you rather have—which do you *think* you would rather have? bulbs or breakfast?"

"Oh, bulbs—ever so much!" said Lily. "Breakfast's stupid, anyhow; it's just omelette and fried potatoes, and beafsteak and hominy, and then mutton chop for a change."

"And muffins and strawberries," put in Jack.

"But I mean days when we don't have muffins," said Lily. "Strawberries are 'most as good, while they last, but then you can't eat 'em all day for six months."

"Not exactly," said Jack; "but you can bulbs."

"Jack, do hush!" said Lily. "Go back to your Latin and stay there, as papa said."

"Thanks—I've done my Latin."

Lily turned her back to him with a sigh at this

information, which said that (for her) the Latin might be indefinitely extended.

"Which would you rather have, Prim?" said Clover.

"I *think* I'd rather have bulbs," said Prim. "But then, you know, I've always had breakfast."

There was a good deal in that—there must be!

"Listen to me, Clo," said Jack, "and I'll tell you of somebody who had 'em both, and eat 'em both, too."

"Eat up his hardy bulbs!" cried Primrose in horror.

"His hard bulbs," corrected Jack. "At least they weren't his, but somebody else's, till he'd eaten 'em."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Lily indignantly.

"Very good," answered Jack. "As papa says, I shall not contradict you. Only when I've eaten half yours, then you'll know."

"Mine are all planted, thank you," said Lily.

"That makes no odds," said Jack. "A few hours in the ground don't hurt 'em. You'll know—when they don't come up in the spring."

"O Jack!" said little Primrose.

"But what is the story?" asked Clover.

"Oh, some woman out West got a lot of bulbs—real handsome ones, hers were; yours ain't a cir-

cumstance to 'em—and stowed 'em away till planting time. And a young Celestial she had 'round "——

"A *what?*" asked Primrose.

"A Chinese, stupid! Don't you know China's the celestial empire? Well, this pigtail found the bulbs, and took 'em for onions. So he tried one now and then with his lunch, and before the old woman found it out he had 'em half eaten up."

"Oh," cried Primrose, "what became of him, Jack?"

"Can't tell you," said Jack, "that's the story. Bulbs didn't kill him, and *she* didn't; that's all I know."

The more Clover studied the matter, the more sure she felt that Dick Nobody ought to have some of her bulbs. If anything left the question doubtful that night, the next morning settled it. Did not her father read at prayers a clear direction out of all her difficulties?

"'He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.'"

What could be plainer? Of course hardy bulbs were subject to the same rule. A few she had still unplanted: but as these were mostly of one kind, Clover resolved to take up three or four of those already in the ground, so that Dick might have a

variety. All this Clover turned over in her mind during breakfast, and for once in her life hardly knew she was eating waffles; for it must be owned the thought of disturbing those hyacinths she had arranged with so much care and pleasure, was not in itself agreeable. Clover found she had to think as hard as she could of the other side of the question; and even then, her face was very grave and absent.

"My dear Clover," said Mrs. May at last, "what are you pondering?"

"Hardy bulbs," said Jack at a venture. But to Jack's own surprise, Clover blushed and answered:

"Yes, mamma, so I was."

"That comes of keeping them overnight," said Lily. "If you had planted them all, as I did, they'd have been off your mind."

But Clover let that pass, and went back to her musings, for a new question had just presented itself: Where could Dick Nobody possibly plant his bulbs or keep them, if he had them?

"Sam," she whispered, catching hold of her brother's arm as he left the table, "*must* bulbs be kept in a cellar? I mean, won't any other place do? I mean!" said Clover, correcting herself once more, "can't people have bulbs who haven't a cellar?"

"And have them bloom?" said Sam, "I suppose you mean that too?"

"Oh, of course."

"Well, it is not so easy," said Sam, "unless they have some other things, which are quite as likely to be absent. For instance, a nice, cool, dark, airy closet will do—one where there are shelves, but no mice."

Clover shook her head. "You may well say 'quite as likely,' " she answered, measuring the closet by some probable pattern in her mind.

"Or again," said Sam, smiling to himself, "the bulb pots may be set under the staging in a greenhouse and covered with a few inches of sand to keep off the light."

"Dear me!" said Clover, "what impossible things you do tell, Sam!"

"Then, if there is a good bit of ground outside the house," her brother went on, "hard and dry and smooth, the pots may be set *there*, and covered six inches deep with coal ashes or tan, or even leaves. Or their standing ground itself may be a bed of coal ashes. There they may stay for a couple of months, and take no harm."

"Too late for that, then," said Clover, with a thoughtful face.

"Well," said Sam, "failing all these, they *can* be grown in a sitting room, setting the pots in damp moss, so that the dry air of the room may not shrivel

them up. And in that case, I should advise the laying a thick folded newspaper over the top, to soften the light. Or he might set them in a box with a few air-holes cut in it; that would make a good dark closet of itself."

"*He* might?" said Lily; "whoever are you talking of, Sam?"

"Anybody," said Sam, "and Nobody in particular."

It was all Clover could do to keep from laughing right out. Of course Sam could not know what *she* was thinking of; but then his words hit the mark so exactly, that it was great fun. And when she ran off to the window, and bent over Lily's bulbs, Clover's plump little shoulders fairly shook with delight.

"What's in the wind, Clove?" Sam called after her; "are you going to experiment too? Aren't all your bulbs planted yet?"

"Not quite all," said Clover.

"Time they were, then," said Sam, coming to the window and softly pinching the aforesaid shoulders.

"Well, you'd be very wise if you did try my experiments," said Lily, "with all the bulbs you've got left. You see how splendidly mine grow."

"Mamma says," observed Sam, "that whenever we want to try experiments of any importance, it is

well to pray over them first." And with that Sam went off.

"He grows queerer and queerer every day!" said Lily. But a happy look came over Clover's face, though she did not tell why. How was it that Sam always said just what she wanted? Of course the Lord could direct her "experiment," and then there would be no mistakes.

Now it often happens both to children and grown people, that the Lord's answer to their prayers is not precisely what they expect. The answer comes, and never fails; but instead of being a plain yes or no, it sometimes brings on much further study and many new questions. It settled one thing for Clover—the experiment must be tried beyond a doubt; but there came up a new difficulty.

"I never *could* make Hannibal remember all those directions and ways of doing," thought Clover to herself. "And if I wrote them down, I don't know whether Dick would understand them. Maybe he can't read writing, to begin with, and it would take me ever so long to print them all. There's nothing for it but to go myself."

And just so soon as this point was clear and disposed of, up started another, or rather two.

"I can't tell anybody, and mamma never let me go so far alone." Thus disputed the questions

back and forth, till Clover was in a perfect puzzle. But it is a pretty well established rule, that when people begin asking the Lord's help honestly, they will keep on ; and so it was not long before Clover had prayed herself quite out of that puzzle. To be sure, as sometimes happens, it did seem as if she had prayed herself just into another ! For in the very front row of all her plans and questions stood this very troublesome fixed fact :

“ I must consult mamma ! ”

CHAPTER VI.

It was not too easy a matter. In the first place, Clover did not want to tell anybody, and she could only comfort herself out of that with the thought that the Lord knew, and that telling her mother was really the next easiest thing to telling Him.

"But then He knew before," thought Clover to herself. "That makes a difference."

Then she must have a quiet little time for her consultation, and just now the house was full of guests, and whenever Mrs. May went anywhere away from them, if it was only to the kitchen, Lily and Prim were sure to rush after her, eager to have their mother to themselves for a little while. So that Clover's special five minutes was hard to find, and the season was running on, and she felt in a hurry.

At last, however, the visitors went their way, to the undisguised delight of all the younger children.

"I do *not* see why people go visiting," said Lily, "so long as they've got houses of their own!"

Clover felt rather shocked.

"Lily, I don't think it's respectful to speak so of our guests," she said.

"They're not mine, thank you," said Lily, "and never will be; just you wait till *I* have a house."

"You?" said Prim. "O Lily! do you expect to have a house all by yourself?"

"Of course," said Lily. "I expect to be married and have a house some day."

Such a daring flight of imagination quite took away Prim's breath to reply.

"Then I suppose you'll have a great many bulbs," she ventured at last.

"I shall have *everything*," said Lily; "bulbs and hanging baskets, and a grand piano. And every time I go to work in my garden, I shall have a new pair of gloves."

"Oh!"—for that last item touched Prim nearly. Prim greatly disliked gloves that were either soiled, or sticky with the damp, or stiff from its effects.

"But that would be rather hard upon the people who have no gloves," said Mrs. May, who had come in while Lily spoke.

"How, mamma?" said Lily. "What has my having new gloves to do with other people?"

"If you have so *many* new gloves," said Mrs.

May, "it might hinder your helping other people to have any—people who like new gloves just as well as you do, and have no money to buy."

"Do you mean Prim, mamma?" said Lily. "Clover always has new gloves, because hers never wear out."

"Because she takes better care, and does not wear them out. No, I do not mean Prim; I mean other people in the world. Somebody says: 'Whoever keeps more than he needs, is the thief of his brother.'"

"Mamma!" said Clover, for she thought how nearly (in her heart) she had robbed little Dick Nobody. Certainly she had not *quite* wanted to give him a share of her bulbs.

"I haven't got more than I need," said Lily gaily, "and never shall have, I guess. I want whole loads of things for myself now."

Clover stood looking out of the window; there had been a light snow the night before, and the whole outer world was fair and white.

"Mamma," she said suddenly, "let's take a walk."

"Lily has a cold, and I think she is better in to-day," answered Mrs. May; "and Prim has been out enough. You can go if you like."

"Why, she's been out all the morning!" said Prim; "just walking round and round her garden."

Clover laughed and blushed, but stood to her point.

"If you would go with me, mamma, I should like it so much!"

"Is the snow so delightful that you want me to enjoy it?" said Mrs. May, smiling.

"The snow is delightful, but it wasn't that," said Clover, as usual coming right out with the truth. And then she waited, and didn't dare say any more. Mrs. May glanced at her, using that quick discernment, which it would be well if all mothers had, and at once decided to go.

"The air is very fine," she said, folding up her work. "It can do me nothing but good, I am sure, to have a walk in this beautiful snow, and we will go at once, my dear, while the sun and the shadows are at play."

"O mamma!" said Primrose, clinging round her "we shan't be at play in here, mamma!"

"Then you must be at work," said Mrs. May. "I have always found that (next to play) work was the very best thing. So you may put my work-table in order, while I am gone, and Lily may regulate my basket, and look over the stockings that have just come from the wash."

"And may I roll them up too, mamma?" said Lily eagerly.

"Yes, if you will be very careful not to roll up some hole in the toe or rip in the heel, for your father to find out when he puts the stockings on."

"Dear me, I guess I'll never do *that* again!" was Lily's answer; while Prim ran to the work-table and began to empty the drawers, just for the delightful pleasure of rearranging them. They were in order now.

But when the other two had fairly set out on their walk, Clover still found it no easy matter to speak and present her case. To be sure, she was somewhat hidden away at the end of her deep crimson hood; but still Clover felt as if her mother could see straight through *that* with no trouble at all. And so for several turns round the little garden Clover said nothing; stepping over the white snow without seeing it, and not noticing the clear blue shadows in the least. Mrs. May waited a little, willing to let her have her way, but at last, as the brown study grew deeper and deeper, she began softly to speak out her own thoughts:

"He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth; His word runneth very swiftly.

"He giveth snow like wool; He scattereth the hoar frost like ashes.

"He sendeth forth His ice like morsels; who can stand before His cold?

"'He sendeth out His word and melteth them ;
He causeth His wind to blow, and the waters flow.'"

Clover drew a long breath of pleasure.

"And then up come our bulbs, mamma!" she said.

"Yes," said Mrs. May, smiling; "are you in a hurry?"

"No, mamma—I think not. Not much," said Clover. "Sam says impatience generally means discontent with the Lord's time, and so I've been trying hard not to be impatient. But it is so pleasant to have pleasant things to expect, mamma!" said Clover, with a bright look of pleasure that somehow changed and grew wistful as she spoke.

"Very," said Mrs. May, returning the look. "I wish everybody had, Clover."

"O mamma! so do I. Oh! that is just it," said Clover. "And I suppose they don't always," she added softly.

"Not always; some people never. And I think when people have lived without pleasure for a good while, they get out of the habit of expecting it."

"But that is *very* bad," said Clover, intent upon her thoughts. "Mamma, I wish they could get *in* the habit again. What would be the effect of having pleasure come when they *didn't* expect it?"

"The effect," said Mrs. May, smiling quietly to herself, "would be to make them more ready to look for it another time, I should think."

"Yes, mamma, I should think so too; and so by degrees they would get into good habits. Mamma," said Clover, trying hard to speak unconcernedly, and failing very much in the attempt, "would you be afraid to let me take a walk by myself this afternoon?"

"Are you tired of my company?" her mother asked.

"Mamma! mamma! how can you say such words?" cried Clover, seizing her mother's hand and holding it close up to her own flushed cheeks. "I just wanted to go alone for a particular reason."

"How far?"

"I think—Sam called it about two miles," said Clover. "But it is just the open road, mamma, all the way."

Mrs. May shook her head. "Too far for you to go alone, love. "Won't Sam go?"

"Mamma, I didn't want Sam to go, for a particular reason," said Clover.

"Oh, if there are so many 'particular reasons' about, of course they confuse matters. How would Jack do?"

"Mamma—Jack doesn't understand," said Clover.

"Another particular reason against him. And your father wants Hannibal this afternoon. If I dare offer my services," she continued, with a glance at Clover's busy face, "should I run against any of the reasons, love?"

"Dear mamma, you are the very best possible—if I must have somebody," said Clover, getting hold of her mother's hand again, and speaking with some difficulty. "And it's nothing worth making a fuss about; just something I wanted to do, and I thought I ought to go by myself—that is all."

"Shall we go at once?" asked Mrs. May, holding fast the little hand. "When a thing is to do, the way is to do it."

"Yes, mamma, so I think," said Clover. "I can be ready in two minutes."

"I can in three," said Mrs. May. "I want to take little Dick Nobody a loaf of cake for his Sunday dinner, and that is only to put in the basket."

So in three minutes or so the two set forth, Mrs. May with the cake in a small covered basket, which held, besides, a small bit of meat and a loaf of bread. Clover, too, had a little basket in her hand, of the contents of which, however, she said nothing.

The walk was brisk and sweet, with sweet talk by the way, and the two miles came to an end only too soon; but by this time the short November day

was decking itself with long shadows, and already the air brought suggestions of coming frost.

Dick Nobody sat perched on the old fence, his bare feet dangling to and fro in the late sunbeams, the tatters of jacket and trousers fluttering in the November wind—certainly not the figure of one who expected anything pleasant.

"But he will learn!" said Clover to herself. "I suppose the first time could not teach him, but this will make two times; and then if I can think of something nice for Christmas"—At that moment she felt as if she could have given Dick Nobody half her bulbs. Frost and snow had made short work with his poor little garden, and nothing but the poor soil and the broken fence could be seen there now. And in her eagerness to bring a smile and a glad look somewhere in that dreary place, Clover forgot shyness and everything else but the great work in hand.

"O Dick!" she said eagerly, "are your plants *all* dead?"

"Every livin' one on 'em," said Dick.

"And haven't you got any at *all* in the house?" said Clover.

"'Twouldn't be no sort o' use, ma'am. It do freeze in there some nights most as bad as out doors."

"Freeze in the house!" cried Clover.

Dick nodded. "Ain't nothin' to hinder it, ma'am," he said, "'cept mother and me, and we's to work hard keepin' it off us."

"But what will you do with the bulbs I've brought you?" said Clover.

Dick bounded down off the fence.

"Be they posies?" he said, with eyes all aglow.

"Oh, not yet, you know," said Clover, "not till by and by, but by and by they will. Beautiful ones, Dick—all red and blue and white and yellow. See, I've brought you one of each colour."

"The flowers is?" said Dick, surveying the four brown hyacinth bulbs, which at present looked much alike.

"Yes, of course—I mean the flowers," said Clover; "and you must plant 'em so, Dick, and then they mustn't freeze."

Dick listened gravely to all her minute directions, nodding his head once or twice as if he saw through the whole thing.

"I can do it," he said, "all 'cept 'bout the freezin'. I *could* take 'em to bed, but it ain't so sure even there—not sometimes."

Here was a contingency with which Clover could do nothing. And yet Dick looked at the bulbs with loving eyes, and touched them with fingers

that said if he *couldn't* keep them, it would go to his heart. Just then Mrs. May came out of the cottage, where she had been talking to Dick's mother. Clover ran up to her.

"O mamma!" she cried, "how *can* Dick keep his bulbs from freezing? He says they might almost freeze sometimes, mamma, even if he took them to bed with him."

Mrs. May glanced at Clover's little open basket, and saw the state of the case at once.

"Why, how does Dick keep himself from freezing?" she said, smiling at him.

"*I* don't matter, you know, ma'am," said the child, "I ain't a flower."

Mrs. May's eyes watered.

"Poor little one!" she thought. "Dick," she said aloud, "if your room was warm, then you wouldn't be afraid for the hyacinths? You could take care of them then?"

"Guess I would!" said Dick, with a laugh of great assurance.

"Well, I think I can arrange that," said Mrs. May. "So tell him exactly how to manage, Clover, and we'll take care they are kept warm enough."

A few minutes of eager talking on Clover's part, and eager listening on Dick's, and then the two visitors were on their way home again, and Clover's

little basket was swinging back and forth in clear enjoyment that it was empty and not full.

"I think, dear," said Mrs. May, as they reached home, "I think that the Lord's words about not letting the left hand know what the right hand does, mean only when one hand can do the work alone. At other times, you see, they must work on together."

"Oh yes, dear mamma," said Clover, looking gratefully up; "I understand now. And I was thinking—those other words you said—if the Lord's command runs very swiftly, it's no wonder David 'made haste' to keep it. Because another one might come, and then he wouldn't be ready."

CHAPTER VII

THE bulbs were all planted, snugly hid away in the brown earth; doing, Lily said, "nobody knew what." Every day Prim went out to her garden and put it through a most minute inspection, but the bulbs made no sign. Not even the smallest cracking and swelling of the soil gave token of life beneath, as it had done before some of the seeds came up.

"You see," said Clover, "Sam was right. He said we should not find a thing here till spring, and I don't believe we shall."

In the cellar matters were not much more satisfactory, as yet; and even Prim grew tired of inspecting. For awhile she went down there every morning, and got Sam to lift her up within range of the high shelf; but the cellar was dark, and if it had been light, there was nothing to see.

"I won't get up there any more, I believe," said Primrose in disgust. "I'm tired seeing that brown neck of my polyanthus narcissus. I think I'll wait till I can see the green leaves from the floor."

Now was Lily's time of triumph. For in the

strong sunshine at the window, and being watered abundantly, the little shoots of her bulbs began to look decidedly green, and even seemed to push up a little way and make progress. Lily danced round them and sang, and was not in the least modest about her superior skill and wisdom.

"I shall write to Mr. Vick about it," she said. "At once, I think."

"Oh, I wouldn't write at once," said Clover. "You can't describe the flowers yet."

"But I can tell him which they are just as well, from my labels," said Lily. "This hyacinth has grown the most—my *Pluie d'Or*."

Primrose looked at *Pluie d'Or* some moments in silence.

"But it may not be in flower the first," suggested Clover.

"That makes no difference," said Lily, "I shall write: it's only fair to let Mr. Vick know. You see it might be a great help to his flowers this very winter."

"I dare say he'll have some, anyhow," said Clover, with a certain quiet irony of which she herself was hardly conscious.

"And Mr. Vick might reply," said Jack, "'Show me thy faith by thy works.'"

"Jack, you mustn't quote the Bible for common purposes," said Lily; "and besides, there *are* the

works. Just look at those shoots! Oh, my dear bulbs, how I do love you!" and Lily frisked about, and was (Jack avowed) "as puffed up as any balloon vine that ever grew."

Clover and Prim, on the other hand, had a quiet time of it just now. For waiting is rather hard work, even to those who have practised it for many years—and these children had just begun. And you might notice in these days that they liked to be out a great deal, and to study a great deal, and to walk a great deal, and almost always together; bound by the ties of a common sympathy and interest; while Lily was for ever talking of her experiments and displaying her bulbs.

But even November's winds could not blow always, nor its bright days last; and so, patiently or impatiently, the month came to an end. Sam had so well instructed his young sisters, that two of the gardens were in fair, neat order to the last. Lily's ground indeed showed that her attention was divided; but Clover and Primrose pulled out the weeds and gathered off the dry leaves, and trimmed and tied up the dead twigs and the living branches, so that there was always a smile on each little garden, in spite of wind and frost and snow.

And now snow began to come in heavier flurries, until one day Sam declared that it was time to cover up the bulbs.

"The brown blanket must go on first, before the white one," he said, raking the leaves on the lawn into great heaps. The children all helped at this; it was good fun.

"But, Sam," said Clover, suddenly stopping her busy rake, "why do they need two blankets?"

"Considering they are hardy bulbs," put in Jack.

"Not always sure the white one will come," said Sam. "That is the first thing. And if it comes, and there is no other, then when it is taken off very early in the spring the ground is left bare, and the frost throws the earth up, and sometimes throws out the bulbs."

He took up a great armful of dry leaves as he spoke, and began to scatter them thickly and evenly over Prim's pretty garden, till the brown blanket was at least six inches deep.

"But, Sam, you are covering up *everything*!" said his little sister in some dismay.

"All the better for everything, little one," Sam answered. "Your white lily will bloom all the stronger for it next summer, Prim, and so will Clover's chrysanthemum, for even such very hardy things like a little help."

And Sam finished off the brown blanket, and "tucked it in," as he said, with a light covering of brush, to keep the leaves in place.

"It makes one feel bad," said Prim, turning away

with a rueful face from the sight of her muffled garden.

"Suppose you left it uncovered," said Sam, "and the white blanket was thin, and you came down here some day to find half your bulbs lying on top of the ground, pulled up by the frost—King William tossed out here and Blue Flag there?"

"Oh, that would be *dreadful*!" said Prim.

"And suppose, about the middle of March, you should gently take the brown blanket off, and find every tulip and hyacinth shoot pushing up fresh and strong, just waiting for the light!"

Prim found it hard to answer this charming picture in words: she only put her arms round Sam, as high up as they could reach, and hugged him tight.

"You are such a dear fellow!" she said enthusiastically.

And after all, the gardens looked pleasant in their new trim,—a little wintry, of course, a little deserted, and yet snug and safe, and with such a promise of spring about them as half made amends. Who could tell what the bulbs were doing, at work mysteriously down there in the dark? Prim found plenty to dream about in her garden, even yet, whenever the weather was mild and quiet so that she could be there at all. But instead of the old picture of a small calico dress watching a gay little garden,

there was now a scarlet cloak and hood and the sere brown blanket that covered the bulbs. And this was what Prim sang to herself in these days, or half to herself and half aloud :

“Are they asleep ?
I laid them deep,
And covered them over, out of sight.
The cold winds blow ;
The frost and the snow -
Lock my treasures up in the night.

“There they lie,
Hid from my eye.
What can my treasures be about ?
Waiting for spring,
When everything
Will wake them up and call them out.

“When roots are long,
And shoots are strong,
They will come up and stand and wait ;
Ready for me
To come and see,
Hoping I will not come too late.

“Then hurry and take,
With fingers and rake,
The thick brown blanket all away ;
Let in the light,
And blossoms bright
Will cover the garden day by day.”

“And if it wasn't for my pots in the cellar,” said Prim, “I should wish it was spring this very minute!”

Lily meantime was deep in her letter to Mr. Vick, for (strangely enough) she found it a harder matter than she expected. All her available scraps of paper

were used up, besides a large never-to-be-paid-back loan from Clover, and still she could not satisfy herself well enough to apply for the final, fair, whole sheet of paper. For it was a rule of the house, that whoever wanted more than his monthly allowance of paper, must apply to Mrs. May, and after a letter was once copied off upon her gilt-edged, it must go, faults or no faults ; unless, of course, some mischance came for which the writer was not responsible.

One morning, however, early in December, Lily came down to breakfast radiant.

"I've done it !" she confided to Prim ; Clover had already heard the news.

"Done what ?" said Primrose, who, notwithstanding her reputation for dreaming, was something of a literalist.

"Why, my letter ! I'm just as glad as I can be ; and I guess he'll be when he gets it," said Lily, forgetting to lower her voice in the excitement of facts.

"Whom are you writing to, Lily ?" said her father, somewhat surprised at these masculine pronouns.

"Only Mr. Vick, papa—it's my letter to Mr. Vick."

"More hardy bulbs ? My dear, if I were you, I would not increase the stock of bulbs until patient care had grown a little."

"Why, I'm not writing for more bulbs, papa !"

said Lily, ignoring the rest of the sentence. "It's a letter about those I've got now."

"In difficulties, eh?" said her father. "But, Lily, Mr. Vick is quite too busy a man to answer the letters of all beginners who get into trouble. You forget that his time is precious. I am not willing to have you send such a letter."

"Dear me!" said Lily, in despair. "Did anybody ever hear anything like that? Papa, it's to *help* Mr. Vick!"

Mr May raised his eyebrows a little, and said: "Oh! I beg pardon. But I may still be allowed to doubt whether he would not prefer to help himself."

"Dear papa," said Lily, "you don't understand one bit. It's my discoveries."

"What have you discovered, pray? That it makes three children very happy to have bulbs?"

"Mr. Vick must have discovered that for himself," said Lily shrewdly, "or he would not have sent us the snowdrops. But he thinks, papa, that bulbs must be kept in the dark for ever so long, when you plant them; and it's a great deal of trouble, and you lose the pleasure; and I've discovered that it is *not* necessary," concluded Lily in triumph.

Jack laughed as loud as he dared laugh at the table, and even Sam and his mother smiled a little, but Mr. May kept a grave face. Only he looked at Lily curiously, with a lift of his eyebrows again.

"May I see the letter?" he inquired.

"O papa!" cried Lily—"no, of course not! You'd just pick it all into little bits; because you don't care about bulbs, and so you wouldn't understand."

"Should I not?" said Mr. May. "Well. But who is to secure its being a proper letter in all respects?"

"Why, papa," said Lily, a little hurt, "do you think it isn't?"

"You are not much accustomed to writing to grown-up people, Lily, and so might be disrespectful without knowing or intending it."

"Then I mustn't send my letter!" Lily said, in great disappointment and chagrin.

"Oh, send it, send it, my dear, by all means! Mr. Vick must need recreation now and then, in the midst of his business. And I know no more wholesome recreation than a good laugh."

Lily was quite too mortified to answer. She buttered her bread both sides, and was very near beginning the process over again. Then Clover took up the word with a troubled face.

"Papa," she said gently, "don't you think, maybe, you are mistaken? I thought Mr. Vick would be really pleased to get the letter, and hear how happy we are with his bulbs. And then you know Lily is so smart; she *might* make a discovery, papa, even that *you* didn't know. You said you hadn't

studied bulbs much." And Clover looked anxiously from Lily's downcast face to her father's. Mr. May looked at her.

"Make a mistake? Of course I might!" he said smiling—"about bulbs, most of all. The question is whether Mr. Vick can. But I have no doubt he will be pleased, my dear, if Lily writes him a modest proper letter; and if he laughs as well it will not hurt her, and will do him a great deal of good. So send your letter, Lily, only let Clover see it first; and make all the discoveries you can, in every direction."

"Papa *don't* understand," Lily said softly, twining her arms around Clover as they left the table. "I think it is quite an important letter. Just think, Clover, suppose we had no cellar? Then my discovery makes it all right."

Clover thought of somebody else to whom such a discovery would be useful; but still, with Sam and Mr. Vick on one side, it was hard to take up Lily's new notions. She ran upstairs to hear the letter, and let her own opinion wait.

CHAPTER VIII.

"You see," said Lily, rummaging in her desk, while Clover and Primrose seated themselves in expectant interest; "it's on a good many pieces of paper—and so—I want to be sure I've got 'em all."

"But how do you know one piece from another?" said Clover, looking at the strange medley in Lily's hands. No such collection ever came out of *her* desk.

"Oh, I know 'em," said Lily, "somehow. There that blue piece is the first, and then the white, and then the brown—no, the pink, and *then* the brown."

"But there are two browns," said Primrose, "and ever so many whites."

"They're all numbered, child!" said Lily. "Now don't ask any more questions,—just listen. I'm not going to send *him* these scrip-scrap." And Lily began—

"'DEAR SIR—'"

"Oh! Is that right?" said Clover with a little exclamation.

"Well, what's wrong about it?" said Lily. "Of course it's right. I've seen hosts and hosts of letters that began just so."

"Yes, but"—said Clover. "Never mind, go on."

"DEAR SIR—I dare say it will surprise you to find out that you don't know everything."

"*That's* not polite," said Primrose decidedly.

"Yes, it is," said Lily, "if you'd only just let me read on and not keep interrupting me every minute."

"I dare say it will surprise you to find out you don't know everything, as it will a great many other people."

"There, don't you see what a compliment that is? It's more than polite."

"But, Lily," said Clover,—and then she stopped in a tangle of words and meaning.

"It isn't a compliment for you to tell other people he don't," said Prim.

"I'm not going to, child!" said Lily. "I'm only telling Mr. Vick himself."

"Then you ought to say 'would,' and not 'will,'" said Primrose. "It would if you told them."

"What a fuss!" said Lily, but making the proposed change.

"It seems to me," said Clover, having by this time stroked out her thoughts, "that *I* should

say it will surprise Mr. Vick to find out that *we* know *anything*; or, at least, that you do, for Prim and I haven't made any discoveries. But don't you think it would be more graceful, Lily? Mr. Vick is so much older than you, and understands so much."

Lily pondered.

"I'd just as lief," she said (it was not often that the word graceful came up about any of *her* doings); "perhaps it would be better. You see it astonishes Sam, and papa, and everybody, so I don't see why it shouldn't Mr. Vick; but I can't change it on this blue scrap—there, I'll make a big mark, so, till I copy it off."

"'I've made a great discovery.'" ('Because it really is great,' put in Lily.) "'You can have all the pleasure out of your bulbs, without waiting for it, or taking any of the trouble. Of course they have to be planted, but that's only pleasure. You plant them first, and then you set them right in the parlour window. And they're so happy, they turn green right away. Clover and Primrose put theirs down in the cellar, and some of mine are there too; but now I shall bring them up. I thought it was right to write.'" "

"Right to write don't sound well," said Primrose.

"Well, it ought to," said Lily; "there is no other word I can take."

"You might say 'proper,'" suggested Clover.

"I guess *you* would, if you'd ever had it said to you as often as I have," said Lily. "I'll say kind, if you like that better."

"Girls can't be kind to grown-up people," said Clover. "Say you thought you ought to write."

"'Thought I ought to write and let you know,'" said Lily, making another mark, "'because you've been so kind to us, and we like your bulbs so much.'"

No fault could be found with this sentiment. Clover and Primrose began to look at the scraps of paper as if it must be rather a nice thing to write to Mr. Vick.

"That's pretty much all," said Lily, searching among her scraps. "Where's No. 10? Oh, here it is—

—"and the seeds last summer were splendid! You never saw anything like our gardens.'"

"Why, yes, he must—because he had the same seeds himself," said Primrose.

"I don't suppose his garden was like ours, if he had," said Lily, reading on very fast.

"'I had the most of everything—ground and flowers and weeds—only Clover did the most work. Prim's little, and Sam helped her sometimes.'"

"Oh, only once!" cried Prim,— "when I'd been sick. Tell Mr. Vick that, won't you, Lily?"

"Why, do you s'pose he'd care how it happened?" said Lily, reading on again.

"I didn't have any more seeds than the others, but mine were more striking kinds. Clover had a great deal of mignonette, and things that don't show for much; and then there were several places in her bed where there was nothing at all. I don't know how it happened, for she had a great many plants to begin with."

"I know," Primrose was just opening her lips to say, but Clover stopped her.

"I must go now and water my bulbs, Mr. Vick. You see when they're in the parlour, you must water them every day; but it isn't much trouble, and it's a great deal pleasanter than running down into the cellar to see if they've started yet. Next year I shall put all mine in the parlour at once. It makes the parlour look beautiful; so that's another advantage.

"I've read this to Clover and Prim, and they know it's all true. And I suppose they'd be very glad to write to you too, only they haven't made any discoveries yet. Very probably they will in future.

"Good-bye, Mr. Vick,

"LILY MAY."

"Oh, you ought to say something more than that," said Clover.

"Why, I could say a great deal more," said Lily, "but you know papa said he hadn't much time."

"But I mean at the end," said Clover. "You ought to finish it more, Lily."

"I have finished it," said Lily; "I've said good-bye. What do you want me to say?"

"We don't stop short so when we're writing to mamma," said Clover.

"No, we don't, that's a fact," said Lily. "Well, shall I say 'affectionately yours,' as I do to Maria Jarvis? I can't say 'your affectionate daughter,' you know."

"I should say 'respectfully,'" said Clover; "that sounds right. Or 'gratefully'—I'm sure we are very grateful."

"Yes, I like gratefully," said Lily. "Oh, well, I'll remember when I come to write it off; white scrap No. 10 is quite full now. N. B.—Yours gratefully."

"What does N. B. mean?" asked Primrose.

"People put it in letters," said Lily.

"But I like to know what I put in *my* letters," said Prim.

"Well, this isn't your letter, so you needn't worry," said Lily; "I'll risk it, as Jack says."

"But, Lily, I wouldn't risk saying the wrong thing," Clover ventured gently.

"Of course not," said Lily. "N. B. isn't

wrong. I've seen it in books, and in one of papa's letters."

"I'd ask papa how to use it then," said Clover; "or Sam. Because to be in the wrong place is almost as bad in a letter as to be the wrong thing. I'd ask him about 'Dear Sir,' too."

"Dear me!" said Lily. "Anybody would suppose I was just six years old. It isn't your letter, you know, and so, of course, it's written differently. I can't fuss over things for ever. My letter won't get sent till spring, at that rate, and I want to copy it right off. Prim, run and ask mamma for a pink sheet of paper. Letters about flowers oughtn't to be on white," added Lily, who had some fancies of her own, in spots.

Prim brought the paper, and then she and Clover went off together, leaving Lily to her important business.

"Clover," said her little sister as they went down stairs, "do you think it really is a discovery?" But that was hard to answer.

"You know, dear," said Clover hesitating, "I think Sam knows a great deal—and of course Mr. Vick does. And I have left all my bulbs in the cellar."

"Yes, so have I," said Primrose thoughtfully, "and sometimes I wish I hadn't. And if it's all a mistake, what *will* Mr. Vick say? And—oh,

there's Sam!—let's go right down and see if our bulbs have started yet."

It gave a happy diversion to Prim's thoughts from that last knotty question, to find that in the cellar there certainly was a stir. Two or three crocuses had made unmistakable progress, and several hyacinths were pushing up out of the dark soil, and one polyanthus narcissus even showed a green tip.

"That pot may go upstairs at once," Sam declared, "and this hyacinth too. Some of Lily's are ready, but we may not touch them without leave."

In great delight Clover and Primrose carried the two bulb pots upstairs, and set them in the full sunshine at the window and watered them—for now the earth looked rather dry.

"Oh, how glad they must be!" said Primrose, who was herself half out of her wits with joy; "and it's so nice that one should be yours and one mine. Now we must find Lily and tell her. Sam said she had several."

Lily was still deep in her letter when the news came, but she dropped everything and rushed down to examine for herself. Yes, the row of bulbs on the shelf by the stairs showed even more progress than those on the hanging shelf.

"I'm in the way of making a good many discoveries, I think," she said complacently. "Sam thought the mice would get on this shelf and eat 'em all up."

"Well, why haven't those in the parlour grown as fast as these?" said Primrose, who had a knack at difficult questions.

There is no doubt that discoverers have a hard time!

"They are making roots," said Lily with dignity, "which is the proper way for bulbs to do. I presume they've really grown a great deal faster, only they grow down first, and the others grew up. It's just the difference of direction; I grow up, and Jack grows sidewise."

And Lily went back to her letter, leaving Primrose considerably mystified.

"I thought she'd bring 'em all up into the sunlight the first thing!" she confided to Sam, "and she just says they're well enough there for the present, and she hasn't room for everything in one window."

"Discoverers, little sister," said Sam, "are bound to see their discoveries through, and everything else gives way."

"But, O Sam!" said Primrose, "Lily told Mr. Vick that all he had to do was to set his bulbs right in the parlour window!"

Sam laughed a little.

"I hope he has an extensive front," he said. "Because as Mr. Vick has twenty acres of bulbs in bloom at one time out of doors, it would probably

take a mile or so of parlour windows to hold all he might want to start indoors."

"A mile of parlour windows!" cried Primrose. "But do you think Lily ought to have said 'Dear Sir' to Mr. Vick?"

"Never mind, little sister," said Sam, taking the earnest face in his hands. "Lily did not consult me, you know, and so we will not break confidence by even talking about it. But when *you* write, we'll begin the letter some other way."

CHAPTER IX.

DISCOVERERS, as Sam said, generally feel bound to stand by their discoveries; and so Lily chose to shut her eyes to the fact that the bulbs in the cellar were further advanced than the bulbs in the parlour. She posted her letter to Mr. Vick, and left all her pots on the shelf by the stairway just where they were, although the green leaves were shooting up, and begging for attention. All Lily's attention went to those other bulbs which should have grown, and did not. She had chosen for her experiment some of the most promising ones; early kinds, that were already, as she said, "trying to jump out of their skins." But the shoots which even then had started, had since then made small progress. A little show of growth, the pretty green tip of a leaf or two, had filled Lily with delight at first; but now that they went no farther, the state of things was becoming unsatisfactory.

"What is the matter with this hyacinth, Sam?" she said one morning. "I've watered it and watered it, and it don't grow."

Sam came and examined. "Began at the wrong end, I should say, Lily."

"What do you mean?" said Lily. "There's a lovely green shoot."

"But *not* lovely roots to support it."

"Well, I declare!" said Lily. "To talk of my bulbs wanting roots! Why, they're *all* roots, Sam, don't you see? They must be, because there's nothing else. They haven't grown up, so they must have grown down."

"Then the case passes my skill," said Sam, looking towards the other window, where Clover and Prim's first treasures were swiftly "growing up." Not very much show of leaf yet, but the heads of large clusters of buds in the hyacinths, and a great bulge in the shoot of the polyanthus narcissus.

"Prim's Polly Nar looks like that snake that had swallowed a toad," said Jack.

"Ugh!" said Prim with a twist of her shoulders. "It don't a bit. Well, yes—a little bit; but I wish you hadn't made me think of it, Jack!"

Lily looked too; and secretly wished that any of *her* bulbs gave such promise of flowers, even if they *did* remind her of snakes.

"I shall have the first flower!" said Prim gleefully; but then catching sight of Lily's clouded face, her own grew grave again.

"Will Lily's, perhaps, come first, Sam?" for a

polyanthus narcissus was one of the honoured victims of the discovery.

"Judging from appearances, I should say not."

"But when will hers flower?" persisted Prim.

"Shouldn't like to say, at present."

"O Sam!" said Primrose, gently pounding his hands. "Come, let's go down cellar and see what else wants to come up. Come, Lily. Oh, you don't bring up any of yours, but I want mine just the minute they are ready."

However, Lily followed the party. The bulbs in the window could not be watered again immediately, and it was pleasant to refresh herself with the sight of those green shoots by the stairway. So, while the rest passed on to the hanging shelf, Lily sat down at the head of the stairs to accustom her eyes a little to the darkness of the cellar before she examined her bulbs. The others were busy in great interest and pleasure, and Clover and Primrose had just chosen out two more promising pots of bulbs to take upstairs into the sunshine, when suddenly there broke upon their ears the sound of loud sobbing.

"Oh!" cried Primrose, "Lily has fallen down the cellar stairs and hurt herself dreadfully!"

"No, no!" cried Clover, but she ran too, and reached the stairs first of anybody. There sat Lily on the stairs as they had left her, but with her arms

and her apron flung over the top stair, and her face buried in them.

"O Lily! what is the matter, dear?" cried Clover, running up.

"Did you fall far?" inquired Prim anxiously. But Lily sobbed on and made no answer.

"You *didn't* fall, did you, dear?" asked Clover, trembling all over.

"It's all Jack's doing!" sobbed Lily, "and papa ought to whip him *dreadfully* every day for a week!"

Primrose stood speechless and horror-struck. What could Jack have been about?

"Rather hard on papa," said Sam, with a degree of coolness that astonished his little sisters.

"Yes, of course *you're* glad," said Lily, whose grief had quite got the better of her common sense and civility too. Clover and Prim looked at each other—certainly Lily must be losing her senses!

"But, dear," remonstrated Clover, "Sam's *never* glad,"—about what, she hardly knew how to say.

"And Jack *never* meant to push you down!" said Primrose with a burst of righteous indignation. "So what's the matter?"

"Mice," said Sam as coolly as before.

"Two-legged mice!" flamed out Lily, sitting up and pushing her hair off her eyes. "It's very well to say Jack didn't mean it, but he's just eaten up every one of my bulbs—like that celestial."

"Eaten them up?" said Sam. "He must be an extraordinary boy then, for he was blessed with a particularly good appetite at breakfast."

"Blessed?" Lily repeated,—“I shouldn't think he'd be blessed with much, I'm sure. Do you think he hasn't eaten them, Sam? Do you think he has only just hid them away.”

"I think, decidedly, he has not eaten them," said Sam, examining the bulb pots on the shelf. And now Clover and Primrose looked there too, and, behold, the pots were empty! That is, there was earth enough in them still, but the flourishing green shoots had disappeared. Lamentations were loud and sincere on the part of the two sisters, and Lily had sympathy enough to dry her tears and heal her distress, if sympathy could do it.

"O Lily! what can have become of them?" said Clover for the third or fourth time.

"Sure, they was just beautiful, miss," said one of the maids, peering down the cellar stairs. "I've been watching 'em day in and day out; and thinks I, if Miss Lily was of *my* mind, she'd have the beauties up beyant in the parlour windy, like Miss Clover and Miss Primrose."

"You saw the shoots then, Jane?" said Clover eagerly.

"'Deed an' I did, miss. They was that long yesterday."

"Oh, what *could* have happened to them?" Clover repeated.

"Jack," said Lily.

"Mice," said Sam.

"A two-legged mouse," said Lily

"Several four-legged mice," said Sam. But with that Lily began to cry again.

"It's hard enough," she sobbed, "and bad enough, too, without anybody's making fun. And I don't see why you always uphold Jack. The mice are twenty times as reliable."

"For eating bulbs," said Sam.

"For *anything*," said Lily, with a disturbed founce. "What do you want to uphold Jack for, Sam May?"

In spite of sympathy and everything else, it was impossible to help laughing a little at this outburst.

"My dear unreasonable young sister," said Sam, "since when have you developed such an extraordinary tenderness for mice?"

"Yes, you want to make it out mice, because you said they would," said Lily.

"Oh, oh!" cried Primrose, "Sam want 'to make out things!' Lily, I should think you"——

"You should think, as I do, that Lily feels very bad," said Sam kindly. "Run up and ask Jane to bring a tray, Prim, and we'll transport all these bulb pots up into the light, and make a fair examination into the state of the case."

Well, when one is in trouble, it is a great relief to *do* something. Even Lily roused up at that, and helped put the pots on the tray while Sam held it, and eagerly followed upstairs to assist at the examination.

"Oh, there is one left," said Clover, pointing to a small green shoot.

"More than one," said Sam, setting his tray on the kitchen table. "See, Lily, almost all the crocuses are safe."

Lily dried her eyes and looked on, half gloomy, half cheered.

"I suppose he did not like crocuses," she said.

"No, Mr. Mouse prefers hyacinths, and so does Mrs. Mouse and all the family. Even the tulips, you see, were neglected at first, and so the most of these are safe too."

"Then the mice really did eat 'em," said Primrose with a long sigh of relief, as conviction dawned on her mind.

"Eat 'em? Of course," said Sam. "I declare they made clean work. Look!"

He emptied one of the pots down on the tray. Not a vestige of the hyacinth was there, only two or three bits of the red skin which had covered it, and the label and the earth. Another and another Sam turned out, with just the same result. Even the fibrous roots were gone, and nobody would have

guessed there had ever been a bulb there at all. Lily took up the bits of red skin and passed them mournfully through her fingers.

"My poor, pretty bulbs!" she said, "and my nice labels—all for nothing!"

"But you shall have half of mine, dear!" said Clover, thinking it was time now a little joy should step in.

"And of mine, too," said Primrose, though feeling in her secret heart that it was rather hard upon other people to have people try experiments. Primrose was not sure that in that case they ought not to try them straight through and take the consequences.

Lily sat still, looking at her empty pots.

"The mice *never* could have got on that shelf," she said. "Why, Sam, it was as much as I could do to reach it from the steps."

"Certainly," replied Sam, "but then the mice ran along a beam, and jumped down. A much easier way."

"Then they'd have been there now," said Lily.

"Not at all; they would run down the post a little way, and jump off where the stairs were nearest."

Lily drew a long sigh. "Well," she said, "I suppose they must. But it's hateful to make mistakes!"

"Less matter about mice than about some other

things," said Sam, who was emptying the rest of the pots, and putting them neatly together.

"Yes, you made a great mistake about your two brothers," said Primrose with a little extra dignity. She was rather inclined to be strict with experimenters this morning.

"So I did," said Lily with another sigh; "but Jack always is up to anything, and Sam knew I didn't mean anything about *him*."

"Pardon me; I thought you *did* mean it at the time."

"Oh, well, just at the time, perhaps; but not really, Sam. Worried people never mean really what they say."

"Do they not?" said Sam, smiling a little. "Then it would be well, perhaps, for worried people to practise silence."

"And I'm sorry anyhow," said Lily, with a very penitent face.

"And I am sorry you have lost your bulbs," said Sam, with a forgiving kiss.

"But we'll give her part of ours," said Clover eagerly. "She shall just choose which she likes of mine." And Sam walked away smiling and humming to himself:

"Half enough for one, will often
Spread a royal feast for two!"

CHAPTER X.

"MAMMA," said Primrose, "Jack says that little discoveries are great humbugs."

"That shows the amount of practical wisdom which Jack has yet attained," said Mrs. May with a smile.

"I think so, indeed!" said Lily. "Mamma, because I was mistaken about the mice, *does* it follow that I should be about everything else?"

"By no means."

"Well, then," said Lily. "*I* don't see why he talks."

"Most people are fond of that exercise, Lily."

"Yes, but I mean about me," said Lily. "Of course the mice *were* a mistake. But then my other experiment, mamma, *that's* succeeding beautifully. You can see for yourself."

Mrs. May looked towards the windows, which were now getting pretty full of bulb pots. On one side stood all that were left of Clover's set, all she had kept for herself. Strong, fresh shoots, growing steadily and surely on to their perfection; not quite fast enough, perhaps, for Clover's wishes, but quite

fast enough for their own strength. Mrs. May thought this division looked best of all. Prim's bulbs, indeed, had had almost equal advantages ; but she had a way of touching the green shoots, feeling them softly between her thumb and finger, which (gently as it was done) did by and by leave an impression. The shoots took on a slightly pinched look, and the freshness of their green was something abated by these liberties which Clover's more patient fingers never dared to take. Still, on the whole, Prim's bulbs looked well. But Lily's looked all sorts of ways. There were first the victims of the experiment ; some standing just still, with no more look of growth than when they were planted ; others with a small, sickly shoot that was part green and part yellow ; and one or two more that, by great exertions on their own part and on hers, had stretched up a little, seemingly for no better purpose than to hang their heads and say how weak they were. Then there were the contributions from Clover and Prim. But even they showed plainly that they had changed hands ; for while Clover carefully turned her bulb pots round every day and often twice a day, noting the least bend of the shoots from their proper uprightness, Lily let hers stand till they were lopping quite over, and looking as if they were ready to tumble out of the pots. It was another of Lily's discoveries.

"Bulbs must grow," she asserted. "And if you turn them round every minute, they'll be always just criss-crossing about, and never have a chance to grow up."

"Up into the antipodes," said Jack, pointing to one green shoot that was already passing the line of the horizontal in a downward direction.

"Well, that one might be turned round," said Lily, whirling the pot of the polyanthus narcissus until the prostrate shoot pointed off into the room. "Now you'll see by to-morrow how beautifully it will straighten up, and be as tall again as if it hadn't lain down."

"Lain down!" said Jack derisively:

"Poor Polly Nar
Has run so far,
She found herself footsore, O,
So down she lay
That very day,
And never got up no more, O."

"Be quiet," said Lily. "What do you know about bulbs? Talk about what you understand. She'll be up long before you learn grammar."

"No, she won't," said Jack. "Just listen."

"For there, alack,
The broken back—"

"The back *isn't* broken!" cried Lily. "No more than mine is. Jack, I wish you would just hush up."

"My dear," said Sam, coming up to the window, "discoverers must always expect a certain amount of cold water from other people."

"Such discoverers," said Jack. "Look there, Sam,

"Ha ! ha ! ha ! ha !
Poor Polly Nar !"

"Ah, Jack, that isn't kind," said Clover. "Mamma says we should be very tender of other people's mistakes."

"Oh, if Solon is on hand, I'm off," said Jack, dancing out of the room to the tune of poor Polly Nar.

"But, Clover, what do you mean?" said Lily, with a more anxious face than she had bestowed upon Jack's strictures; "why do you talk about mistakes?"

Clover hesitated a little, her eye glancing from the weak, stunted, unhealthy growth in Lily's bulb pots, to the thrifty shoots that adorned her own. It was not too easy to answer. Lily's eyes took the same course.

"I dare say your bulbs were the strongest, to begin with," she said in a vexed tone. "You know Sam said there was often a difference, and now you see there is."

"Not in this case," said Sam. "Clover's bulbs were no stronger than yours."

"I suppose," said Clover slowly, "things do not always succeed the first time. And then you know, dear, Mr. Vick has planted so many bulbs—it wouldn't be strange if he was right."

"But he isn't right!" said Lily. "Not about that. You'll see when his letter comes. *Then*, I hope, you'll all be content."

"O Lily! do you expect to get a letter?" cried Prim wonderingly.

"Of course I do. You'll see. Mr. Vick will be delighted with my discovery, and only sorry I did not make it a great while ago."

"But a *great* while ago you hadn't discovered how to grow yourself," said Primrose.

"I never saw such a child," said Lily; "never. I don't mean a hundred years. Oh, I wish the letter would come!"

Clover glanced up at her brother's face, and read something there which disturbed her more and more. But Sam said nothing. This was one of the cases, he thought, to be left for time's slow teaching.

"Do you think Mr. Vick will write, Sam dear?" said little Primrose.

"I have no doubt he would like to write," said Sam with a perfectly grave face, "but I can think of two or three things that might hinder him. Meantime, chicks, Christmas is coming; and if

there is anything special for me to do, I should like to know it at once."

Christmas! At that magical word all clouds vanished, and doubts and disappointments took their flight.

"Oh, there's a great deal!" cried Primrose.

"Whole hosts," said Lily. And Clover smiled with a face that told of some plans, at least, marked "private and confidential."

"Do you know, Sam," she said, "my head has run upon flowers so this year, that I can hardly think of any presents *but* flowers to give anybody."

"Very good," Sam answered. "Then I suppose I may expect the finest camellia that can be bought for money, in full bloom—a new variety, that has flowers all the year round—pink, spotted with scarlet."

"Oh no, you can't have that!" said Clover, laughing, "because I am not rich enough to buy camellias, and I suppose there isn't such a one in all the world."

"Lily might go and discover it," said Jack, who had come in again and perched himself on a chair within hearing.

But Lily treated this proposal with silent disdain.

"You know," Clover went on, "mamma comes first, and I thought maybe we three could join together and get her a hanging basket. I should

like to get the basket itself first, and then each of us might choose something to put in it."

"Oh, that is a *beautiful* thought!" said Primrose. "I never saw anything like Clover's thoughts."

"Except Lily's," said Jack.

"Yes, I think it is a very good idea, myself," said Lily. "But we might get one of those splendid big baskets that they have in the catalogues, all filled and ready."

"Cut it out and paste it on the wall," Jack suggested. "Another discovery! Dear me, I'm glad I was not born a hundred years ago!"

"If you had been, you'd have picked up some sense by this time, I hope," said Lily. "Wouldn't that be better, Sam?"

"But I think," said Clover, "those would cost too much. They look so expensive; and I believe mamma would like three little plants that we chose to put in just as well."

"Much better," said Sam. "And if you could only contrive to get me that camellia among you, I would make your basket myself. Then you would have the more money to spend on the plants."

"O Sam! how good you are!" said Clover, her cheeks flushing with pleasure.

"He's just splendid!" said Primrose, wrapping her arms round Sam.

"You see, Jack," said Lily, "what is the proper way to do when you hear people talk. Listen, and see if you can be of use."

Jack made a low bow. "To be sure!" he said. "Well, if Sam will make the basket, I will choose the plants, and send the bill to you."

"No, indeed," said Clover, laughing,— "not till my purse is bigger. You would ruin me right off."

"Choose the plants? I guess you will!" said Lily. "We three are to choose."

"Well, I choose a white rosebush," said Prim; "a big one that'll flower all the time."

"But a rosebush of any kind is too big for a hanging basket, little sister," said Sam.

"Yes, of course!" said Lily. "I should think you might know."

"Then I'll have a geranium," said Prim.

"That will do," Sam answered; "but before you choose too much, you had better divide places. Who is to fill the centre, and who to drape the sides, and who to climb?"

"Oh," said Clover, "it is all too lovely for anything!"

"I don't see how things can climb out of a hanging basket," said Lily.

"You forget that the basket is hung up by strings or wires," said Sam, "and it is a pretty way to cover these with climbers."

"And have trailing plants to hang over the sides," said Clover.

"It's a pity we must have so many rummaging things, though," said Lily.

"What are rummaging things?" inquired Jack.

"Things that run everywhere," said Lily. "Over the basket and up the strings, and all over everything. And I think *I* ought to choose the tall plant in the centre."

"I don't see why," said Primrose. "It's as easy to choose a tall plant as a little plant, I s'pose."

"Just for the handsomeness of the basket, you know," said Lily. "Because you and Clover always get such green things, and the centre ought to be resplendent and striking."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Jack. "Why don't you put Polly Nar in the centre? she's the most striking object you'll find."

"People don't put bulbs in baskets, you silly boy," said Lily with dignity. "Sam, don't you think I had better choose the tall plant?"

"Mamma likes green things," said Primrose. "And I don't always get 'em, either."

Sam looked from the contented, self-satisfied face of Lily, to the upraised and rather wistful face of little Prim. Should he take the sweet lesson of self-denial from her, and give it to Lily? Should he let matters arrange themselves? Clover on her

part stood a little aside, as if she had nothing to do with the question.

"I think," Sam said, "I must settle it thus: Whoever is willing to be stiff may choose the centre; and whoever can yield gracefully may drape the sides."

"Oh, well, I'm not stiff," said Lily, "but I'll choose the centre."

The wistful look deepened on Prim's face.

"Sam, dear," she whispered, getting hold of his hand, "do you like to have me yield gracefully?"

"Very much!" Sam whispered back with a kiss. And then Primrose smiled and looked happy.

"And so there's nothing left for old Clo' but to climb," said Jack. "Good for her,—I'm glad of it. She's always wanting to hang down and get behind folks. Now up she goes! in sight of everybody. Three cheers for old Clo'! and may she soon be at the top of the house!"

CHAPTER XI.

"It's too delightful!" said Lily, bursting into the room where Clover and Prim were deep in their lessons. "Here's a note from Maria Jarvis, and mamma says we may go!"

"What, to-day?" inquired Primrose.

"Yes, in ten minutes,—so just hurry as fast as you can. Mamma says put on our new merinoes. Oh, dear, I'm so glad!"

"I dare say we can learn something about hanging baskets," said Clover, who took a practical view of most questions.

"Of course we shall," said Lily. "They've got hundreds, I dare say."

"Then we can choose our plants," said Primrose. "We can see which we like best."

"You can't choose 'em out of the Jarvis's greenhouse, child," said Lily.

"We can't *take* 'em out," said Prim with some emphasis. "I suppose people can choose."

"And I was thinking," said Clover, "if we can

only make up our minds—maybe mamma will let us stop at Mr. Scipio's greenhouse coming back and get the plants."

It seemed almost too much to have two such pleasures in one day; but, nevertheless, the consent was given, and the carriage came and rolled them smoothly along to the Jarvis's front door.

"Look!" cried Prim, "there's a basket in every window!"

And baskets were not all. There were stands with early bulbs in bloom, and stands with late chrysanthemums; there were brackets holding out other beauties across the windows, and a glass fern vase, and a lovely flower table. By this the children lingered long. It was wonderful to see such an expanse of flowers in December; and the flowers themselves were strange, foreign-looking affairs, and as brilliant as they were strange.

"*This* is what we ought to give mamma," Lily decided.

"Oh, but Sam couldn't make this," said Primrose, looking at the elaborate work on the under part of the table.

"I didn't mean he should," said Lily. "We must buy it."

Clover shook her head. "It would cost too much," she said.

"Oh, I guess not," said Lily. "I dare say it

didn't cost much. Why, it's nothing in the world but crooked sticks and acorns."

"It cost fifty dollars, anyway," said Maria Jarvis, who felt as if the honour of the table was in danger. "Cousin Will sent it to mamma, and the ticket was left on." The children looked at each other.

"But I suppose that was the plants," said Lily. "We might save on the plants if we had the table. It would be handsome enough all by itself."

"I'd rather save on the table," said Clover, laughing a little. "Maria, what do you call this—this lovely green vine that trails down everywhere?"

"Dear me, I don't know," said Maria. "Isn't it fuchsias? My father says William Stubbs is devoted to fuchsias."

Primrose looked up at Clover. Even she knew better than that. Clover touched the delicate leaves admiringly.

"It is so very beautiful!" she said.

"So I s'pose you'll choose that," said Lily. "I knew it would be some green stuff or other. I shall get this,"—and Lily pointed to a stately Mrs. Pollock geranium, which spread its gay, rich foliage over the centre of the table. Primrose looked to see what was left for her. If Lily would have the geranium, of course Primrose must take something else. There was a wilderness of beauties in the table—white leaves and green leaves, and yellow

leaves; but she wanted none of them. Somehow when you have set your heart on one thing, it seems for a while as if nothing else would do.

"Come!" said Lily, "we can't stand here all day. You can think about it and choose afterwards. Here—get some of this white stuff."

"I don't like it," said Prim. "It is stuff, I think."

"Maybe we can choose better at Mr. Scipio's," Clover whispered; "because we might not be able to get these things, Prim. They look expensive."

"So they do," said Prim, much relieved to find that the grapes were sour; "I'll wait."

"Oh, you can't have flower tables if they're not expensive," said Maria Jarvis; "my father says it isn't worth while."

"But we're not going to have a table," said Prim, "only a basket."

"Well, here are baskets enough," said Maria Jarvis, leading the way from place to place, and pointing out baskets and brackets, and vases and flower tables, till the children were well nigh bewildered. Everything perfect, in colour and leaf and bloom. William Stubbs was just then watering and arranging and modifying some of the great vases in the hall, and as usual was pleased with the children's admiration.

"What are the best plants for a hanging basket, sir?" Lily inquired at last.

"Fifty kinds," said Mr. Stubbs. "How large a basket?"

"Oh, we don't know," said Primrose, "it isn't made yet; but it's only a basket."

"And I suppose it will not be very large," said Clover.

"Well, if it's a small affair," said Mr. Stubbs, "the whole depends on having the right thing. Now with a basket of fair size you can't hardly go amiss. *Coleus Verschaffeltii* and *Centaurea gymnocarpa* and *Sedum Sieboldii* will centre it well. Or you might take Mrs. Pollock and border her with *Centaurea candida*. Then, for drapery, take *Panicum variegatum*, *Vinca elegantissima aurea*, *Tropæolum Ball of Fire* and *Solanum jasminoides*. *Mesembryanthemum blandum* is a pretty thing by itself, but it don't mix so well."

Primrose had stood with parted lips and wide open eyes while this shower of hard words came down upon her curly head. They never could buy any of these,—things with such long names must be *very* expensive! But looking at Clover, Prim saw that her lips were twitching with fun, and Prim felt comforted, though it was still rather mortifying to have their hanging basket named beforehand as "a small affair." Lily on her part was silent from another cause.

"I think we'd better give up the basket," she

whispered to Clover; "you see *ours* would not be worth looking at."

"*Mine* will be," said Clover confidently. She stood watching Mr. Stubbs as he snipped off a leaf or two.

"What is this, sir?" she questioned, pointing to the green vine she had admired before.

"Yes, that's a pretty thing," said Mr. Stubbs; "*Myrsiphyllum asparagoides*. *Fittonia argyroneura* is right next to it, and on the other side is *Tradescantia repens vittata*."

Prim covered her mouth with her hand, lest she should laugh, and put her little face as close as she dared to the mingled foliage of *Myrsiphyllum* and *Fittonia* and *Tradescantia*, wishing for the moment that she was rich enough to buy everything. It would be so grand to give her mother a basket full of those high-sounding names, queer as they were. But by this time Maria and Lily grew impatient and went off, and Clover and Prim followed slowly, with their arms round each other.

"Oh," said Primrose, suddenly stopping short, "Lily never told Mr. Stubbs about her discovery!"

"Hush!" said Clover softly, "don't remind her, dear." And Primrose took the hint and was silent.

"You see," Maria Jarvis was saying, "you must have a great many baskets and tables and things, and they must all be splendid, or you'd better have

none. So my father says. I think one basket looks real mean. Why don't you each get her a basket for Christmas and a table and a bracket for New Year?"

"Oh, but we haven't got money enough," said Lily.

"Make your father do it, then," said Maria. "That's the way I do. I don't buy presents with my own money—I want all that for myself. I just tell my father what to get, and he gets it and I give it. And so I never know what things cost. Does just as well."

"But I shouldn't like that way at all," said Clover. "We want to give something that is our very own."

"I don't see the odds," said Maria. "It isn't your own till you buy it, and if you buy it for somebody I don't see how it's yours then."

"But the money was, to begin with," said Clover.

"Your father gave it to you, didn't he?" said Maria. "So he may just as well give you some more."

Primrose began to feel very uncomfortable. She sat down on a little foot cushion in Maria's room and thought and thought. Had she really nothing of her very own to give away?

"Clover, what do you think?" she said softly. "Papa *does* give us our money."

"Yes, but he gives it to us to spend on ourselves, if we like," said Clover, who had been studying the

question too; "and if we like best to spend it on mamma, Prim—don't you see?"

"Oh yes! and I *do* like it, a great deal better!" cried Prim joyfully. "I wish I had a great deal more to spend; I wish we could give her three baskets, Clover!" And as she looked at the sensible little elder sister who always brought her comfort, a decided wish for even a fourth basket to give away shone in Prim's eyes.

"Oh, but one will be very nice, if we fill it well," said Clover.

"And you don't think it will look mean?" said Prim eagerly.

"I never saw any plants in my life that looked mean," said Clover, "except weeds; and I suppose *that's* only because they are where they have no business to be. Why, Prim, what God and papa think enough for us, *couldn't* be mean, you know."

Primrose looked thoughtful.

"No, I s'pose it couldn't," she said, "because they both love us, and they know. But now, Clover, while Maria's showing Lily her frocks, tell me what I shall get for Sam, and for Lily too."

"I should think for Lily," said Clover, "she has lost so many bulbs, it would be nice if we could get her one or two more."

"Oh yes, that will be delightful," said Primrose; "and for Sam?"

"I don't know about Sam," said Clover; "we must look and think. Perhaps we shall see something at Mr. Scipio's that will do. I should like to get Sam something splendid! Just think of all the trouble he has taken for us this summer."

"Yes, the trimming is very rich," said Maria Jarvis, displaying her dress so near Clover and Prim that they had to look, for mere civility; "and of course it was very expensive. My mother says it's ridiculous to expect to have handsome things without paying for them."

"But you have to pay for everything," said Primrose, thinking of the money she had seen laid down for her own crimson merino.

"Have to pay!" repeated Maria; "yes, but you don't pay much—that's what I mean. You pay so little, that it don't seem to make any difference, my mother says."

"It makes a great deal of difference to me," said Primrose, thinking now of the hanging basket and the empty purses that would follow.

"Oh no, it don't," said Maria; "you can't miss a dollar, you know. My father says a dollar or two more or less makes no difference at all; it's only hundreds that count."

And Primrose thought that, on the whole, Mr. Stubbs, with his long names, was a trifle or two less puzzling than Maria Jarvis and her peculiar ideas about money.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE would have thought, in a house and a greenhouse where there was everything, something might have been found to help clear up the ideas of the three children; but really it was just the other way. If one hanging basket made them sure that Mrs. Pollock was just the thing for a centrepiece, the next scattered all such visions with some brilliant coleus or achyranthes; and Lily would say:

"Get as many geraniums as you like, Prim, for I shall get this." And the next minute a tall fuchsia would make her forget coleus, achyranthes, and everything else. The children had now had their lunch, and had seen the dresses, and were contentedly wandering about from room to room, and from greenhouse to greenhouse, studying the nameless wonders.

"They might just as well have no names," said Primrose, after Mr. Stubbs had assailed her ears with "*Iresine Lindenii vittata aurea variegata*;" "and a great deal better, too, I think. I shouldn't know what I'd got, after I'd bought it, if I bought *that*."

"It's the number of things that puzzles me," said Clover. "I think I must have chosen twenty-five different plants already; and that is rather too much for one basket. But every one looks prettier than the last."

"Well, I've thought of a splendid way," said Lily. "There—now my eyes are tight shut. Now, Maria, you take hold of my hand, and lead me straight up to one of the baskets."

So Maria took hold of Lily's hand, and led her straight up to a most imposing hanging basket in one of the windows. Lily opened her eyes.

"Mrs. Pollock, I declare!" said she, gazing up at the brilliant geranium which lifted its head proudly in the centre of the basket.

"But now you mustn't look at any more," said Prim, "or you won't be contented. Because every new one *does* look the prettiest."

"I'll fix that," said Lily; "yes, I choose Mrs. Pollock. Now we'll walk on. See, this red thing is handsomer than Mrs. Pollock, and the white thing is handsomer than the red, and the green thing is handsomer than the white. That's down one side. Then yellow flowers beat the green thing, and purple leaves go ahead of yellow flowers—and so we come round to Mrs. Pollock again, and as she beats purple leaves, of course she beats them all. I choose Mrs. Pollock."

It was without doubt an original way of choosing, but Lily at least was content, and Miss Jarvis was astonished.

"You are the oddest girls!" she said. "Such a fuss about one basket! Why, I shouldn't think one basket was worth having."

"Ah, but if you can't have any more!" said Primrose; and though Maria looked as if this was a very strange argument, it was still hard to answer. But by common consent the children put off all further study for the one until the many should be out of sight, and so gave themselves up to such other pleasures as the great Jarvis house afforded. And by the time these had been well tried, dinner came, and when that was over came the carriage, and alas! the end of the afternoon. No going to Mr. Scipio's *that* day—and the next day it rained.

"I think we have to cultivate patience just as much in the house as we did out-doors," said Primrose.

"Well, it don't matter much to me," said Lily, "because I've chosen, you know."

"And it's rather good for me," said Clover, "because my head got all full of impossible things, and I can choose better after I get them out."

"Mamma," said Primrose, going over to the side of the room where Mrs. May was at work, "don't you think it's *very* hard to be patient?"

"Sometimes."

"Oh, only sometimes?" said Primrose.

"Perhaps I must say generally. What do you want to be patient about?"

"Oh, that's a great secret, mamma."

"Then I am afraid I shall not know how to give counsel. Because patience grows so differently in different weather."

"Does it?" said Primrose, looking out at the down-coming rain; "I didn't know patience ever had to grow in fine weather. Well, to-day, mamma?"

"Even to-day it would depend upon where patience was planted, and what sort of ground it had. Rain is not so good for some soils as others."

"What sort of ground *could* it have?" said Primrose, leaning her elbows on her mother's knee, and looking up.

"Why it *could* have a very hard, stony, unfruitful ground, called necessity. 'I can't help it,' is the poorest soil I know of in which patience can grow. No shoots are thrifty; no leaves smell sweet."

Primrose nodded her head several times.

"Yes, mamma; I think I've got a little ground like that."

"The next poorest," said Mrs. May, smiling at her, "is *called* wisdom, though that is not its true name. 'It must stop some time,' is very dry soil indeed. Patience may grow there, a little; but it is

a barren growth, after all: hard and stunted, and pretty sure to die out in time."

"But that's just what Lily said this morning," said Primrose. "'Maybe it won't rain all day.'"

"And it wasn't any harm, I'm sure; was it?" said Lily.

"Not the least harm. 'It will stop some time,' is a good ground for hope, but not for patience."

"Mamma, I do not understand," said Clover, coming near.

"*I* think it's a very good ground," said Lily. "My patience has grown ever so much to-day already."

"Has it? What have you been doing ever since you told Prim it would stop some time?"

"Oh, I've been watching the clouds," said Lily.

"And the clock," said Mrs. May.

"Yes, mamma, a little."

"Is it patience—or impatience—that runs back and forth between the clock and the clouds?" said her mother.

"Why, mamma, I don't know. I thought I was ever so patient!" said Lily.

"Does not patience wait?" said Mrs. May.

"Yes," said Lily, "but I'm sure I have waited."

"Why?"

"I couldn't help it, you know," Lily confessed.

"That's the worst ground," said Primrose.

"And then I did think it might hold up, mamma."

"That's the next worst."

"Well, now, you needn't talk," said Lily.

"I'm sure if anybody has been impatient it's you. Mamma, I don't know what you mean. I *have* waited."

"Restlessly."

"Well," said Lily, "I'm always restless. How can people wait?"

"Restfully; and then patience has its perfect growth."

"And what soil is that, mamma?" said Clover.

"Just this," said Mrs. May: "'The will of the Lord be done.'"

"Whatever it be, mamma?" said Clover.

"Whatever it be."

"But, mamma!" cried Lily.

"Mamma," said little Primrose, "do you think God cares about such little things as our"—she was going to say "our hanging basket," but stopped herself in time with a frightened look.

"Prim, *you'd* better be quiet," said Lily.

"But does He, mamma?"

"He cares about the smallest things that we care about," said her mother. "The Lord takes interest in all that interests us; and He sees whether we trust His loving wisdom; He knows whether we are quite willing to do His will."

"To let the rain come, and we stay at home," said Primrose.

"Yes."

"And when people are *quite* willing, of course they are quiet," said Clover. "Mamma, it sounds very beautiful, but I should think it was very hard."

"I don't know how to find such soil as that," said Lily. "Of course people like their own way best."

"Why do you like your way better than Prim's?"

"Why, because I'm older, and know more, and understand things," said Lily. "My way always suits me best. Prim's only a child, mamma."

"Very well. Now just remember that the Lord knows and understands everything perfectly, through and through, and that the wisest person on earth is 'only a child' before Him."

Primrose looked out again at the rain.

"Mamma, you *love* His will best," said Clover.

"Much best."

"Well!—" said Lily, with a breath that certainly was not all patience, "Oh, there's Sam! Sam, do you want us?"

"If mamma does not."

The children rushed away with great delight to see what was on hand now; and Sam led them mysteriously out to the workshop. There on his workbench was a beautiful wooden bowl, made of a single knot of hard wood.

"O Sam, dear!" cried Primrose, "where *did* you get that?"

"In the woods," said Sam. "Isn't that about the right thing?"

"Why, it's splendid!" said Lily. "There wasn't one at the Jarvis's half so handsome."

"The Jarvis's!" echoed Sam; "I should think not. Anybody can go and buy baskets out of the shop."

"And only Sam could get such a beauty out of the woods," said Clover.

"Really," said Sam, "that is such a delicate compliment that I do not know how to decline it. Now, chicks, if you all want to help, you may; because this thing ought to have time to dry a little before the plants go in, and the plants ought to be in and growing just as soon as possible."

"Oh, delightful!" said Lily. "What can we do? Sam, you are magnificent?"

"But won't mamma see it?" said little Primrose.

"We'll hide it away. Now, little one, sit down and pick over these acorns for me. Throw aside any that are broken or wormy and all the acorns that have lost their caps. Put the loose caps by themselves and the perfect acorns by themselves."

"But I thought acorns made oak trees," said Lily.

"I wish that your ideas may be always as correct," said Sam.

"Well, we don't want an oak tree in our basket."

"Don't we?" said Sam. "Don't you wish you could get one there? Clover, you take this seat and this bundle of twigs. Throw away the straight ones and cut the crooked ones into bits of this length. See here, Lily—here is a heap of vine stems. Choose out all of a size, and lay together in one heap, and the next size in another, and so on."

What busy times! What delightful work! Everybody too much engaged or too happy to talk—except now and then a question.

"What do you bore a hole in the bottom for, Sam, dear?" said Prim.

"Drainage. Like the holes in your flower-pots."

"Oh yes." Then silence. "What are these grape-vines for?" said Lily, twisting herself up in the long shoots which curled and wound about her.

"Cords and wires."

"Oh! to hang it up by! How lovely!" said Clover.

"Mamma'd think we were patient enough now," said Lily.

"No," said Clover, "she'd say we were pleased."

"Sam," said little Primrose, "mamma said patience couldn't grow *perfectly* except when people liked God's will the best."

"True," said Sam,—“as everything that mamma says is.”

"Well, *I* don't see how one can," said Lily.
"You see we wanted to go out."

"Then if I had asked you to stay with me, and it had been fine weather, you could not have been patient," said Sam.

"Why, yes!" said Lily; "of course we could, if you wanted us."

"Because we love you so much," said Primrose.

"Ah, yes," said Sam, "there it is. You could stay in the house for me, and be patient, because you love me; but when the Lord wants you to stay"——

"Please don't say that, Sam!" said Clover, with her eyes full of tears; "I can't bear to think that."

"Isn't it so, little sister?" said Sam gently.

"But we can sit here and see you work," said Lily.

"And what sort of wonders is the Lord working out of doors just now?" said Sam:—

"'He maketh small the drops of water; they pour down rain according to the vapour thereof, which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly.

"'He saith to the snow: Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain and to the great rain of His strength.

"'Sing unto the Lord with thanksgiving; sing praise upon the harp unto our God: who covereth the heaven with clouds; who prepareth rain for the earth.'"

CHAPTER XIII.

It was well the children had the hanging basket to think of, for, as Lily said, their patience needed all the help it could get. Hail followed rain, and snow followed hail; and it was in a sleigh, well tucked in with fur robes, that at last they set out for old Scipio's greenhouse. Of course Mrs. May was not to know the special object of the expedition; but as Sam was along, there was no need to ask leave.

"But I'm so afraid everything will freeze all up!" said Primrose, when the sharp air pinched her cheeks and took decided hold of her nose. "Is Mrs. Pollock very tender?"

"She is by no means a hardy bulb," said Sam, laughing, "but we'll try to keep her alive. She can go in the box."

"*That'll* smother her," said Primrose.

"Not in so short a drive. Who wants Mrs. Pollock?"

"Oh, I want her," said Primrose, "but Lily's going to get her."

"Is that the division of labour?" said Sam.
"Well, what does Primrose mean to get?"

"I can't think of a single thing!" said Primrose.
"You know *my* plant has got to run over the sides.
And Clover's is to climb up."

"You and Clover must be very amicable, then,"
said Sam, "because trailing things will climb, and
climbing things will trail sometimes."

"Then we shall be all mixed up," said Primrose.

"Somewhat so, I am afraid. But you won't
mind that?"

"N—o," said Primrose rather doubtfully. "I
think I'd *like* to have mine show all alone."

"It will show, never fear," said Sam, "if you and
Clover choose things that are different enough from
each other. Then the more they mingle the better
they will set each other off."

The sleigh jingled merrily on, and presently the
little greenhouse came in sight, and the children got
out, and Sam went off to the tune of the sleigh bells
again, upon business of his own.

"Dear me," said Lily, as she gave an energetic
knock at the little door, "if he shouldn't have any
Mrs. Pollocks, what should I do!" Then there came
slow steps to the door, and old Scipio looked out
upon his three young visitors.

"De little white blossom!" he said, with a strong

accent of pleasure. "Come to see old Scip once more. Sure I's glad! Come in, little ladies!"

"And these are my sisters," said Primrose, as she stepped in. "This is Clover and that's Lily. And we've come to buy some flowers, Mr. Scipio, for our hanging basket."

"Flowers for de basket?" said the old man, as he bowed low to the introduction. "What flowers de ladies want?"

"I want Mrs. Pollock," said Lily, following Scipio's slow tread into his little greenhouse, where everything was in the freshest and neatest state of sweetness. "I want the very biggest one you've got."

"You see, Mr. Scipio," said little Primrose, with her earnest face, "we're going to give mamma a basket for Christmas. Sam's making it, and we're each going to put in a plant. And Lily wants Mrs. Pollock for the middle."

"Mrs. Pollock very good for de centrepiece," said Scipio, "and old Scip's got 'em, plenty enough. But de biggest one, little lady, jes' make de smallest show."

"Why, it *can't*, if it's the biggest," said Lily.

"Do it, sure!" said Scipio. "Big one jes' stand still—hate to be transplanted. Little one grow."

"But we want the basket to be splendid, right off," said Lily.

"Little lady want it to *keep* splendid, too, I reckon," said the old gardener, with a smile, "and I tell her de best way."

Lily took the matter into consideration, and stood pondering, while Clover went thoughtfully from plant to plant, and Prim careered about in the fulness of delight. She told of her flowers, her beloved little watering-pot, and the half-made basket; and old Scipio listened and replied with a tender look on his face, that said the little white blossom had somehow got near to his heart.

"You see, Mr. Scipio," she said at last, "*I* wanted to get a geranium; but then Lily wanted it too, and Sam said he liked to have me give up."

"Yes," said the old man, smiling gently at the little earnest face, "'giving up' 'most de fairest flower dat grow anywhere, little lady."

"But the thing is," said Primrose, "I can't think of anything else to want, Mr. Scipio."

"Might have two geraniums," said the gardener. "How that do, now? Any objection?"

"Two Mrs. Pollocks?" said Primrose.

"Two dat kind, one too many, in de same basket," said Scipio. "Guess little white blossom best take anoder kind—see dere, now;" and he took down from one of the shelves a lovely ivy geranium—the leaves white and green, with tinges of pink. Shoots and foliage together trailed over

the sides of the pot, and half hid it with their crisp beauty, and soft clusters of white blossoms rose up here and there.

"Oh," cried Primrose, clasping her hands, "Mr. Scipio, that's just the very thing!"

"Is that a geranium, too?" said Lily. "Why, *I* might take that myself."

"But you wanted Mrs. Pollock," remonstrated Prim.

"Well, I s'pose I can change my mind," said Lily. "So did you want Mrs. Pollock."

Primrose looked at Clover in silent despair. And Clover took hold of her hand and gave it a little squeeze, and hardly knew what to say.

"But I doubt if that beauty would grow tall enough for the centre, Lily," she said at last, while the old gardener stood by, curiously watching the three sisters.

"Well, I needn't be the centrepiece, either," said Lily. - "Prim may; she was crazy to, at first."

"Oh, but I'd a great deal rather droop over the sides now," said Primrose.

"So would I," said Lily; "so what are we going to do?"

"I s'pose I'll have to give up,—I always have to give up!" said Primrose, her eyes filling with tears of mortification and disappointment.

"Now that's too ridiculous," said Lily. "As long

as I had Mrs. Pollock, you wanted it, and just the minute I want something else, you want that."

"Oh, well, you may have it," said Primrose, struggling with herself; "only I wish you'd choose in good earnest, Lily, and not be changing about."

"I have chosen," said Lily. "I'll have this ivy geranium, and you can have Mrs. Pollock."

"I don't want Mrs. Pollock," said Primrose. She wandered disconsolately about the greenhouse, looking from one thing to another.

"I know what I want, if I can find it," said Clover, following her; "and here it is, this very minute! Nobody else'll want this, because it's all green."

"Ain't a better thing in de whole house, for a basket, dan dat air smilax," said the old gardener.

"Smilax?" said Clover; "what a pretty name. I'll take that, Mr. Scipio, if you please."

Scipio took down the pot of smilax, looking anxiously at Primrose the while.

"What de little white blossom have?" he said gently. "De good Lord He make so many pretty things, dere's plenty lef' for her."

"It don't seem as if there was anything," said Primrose, with a backward glance at the ivy geranium.

"What little lady want?" said the old man. "Flowers mostly, or jes' coloured leaves?"

Prim," said Clover, "if I were you I would have

flowers—gay ones. You see my vine on the cords will be only green, and Lily's geranium is just green and white with white flowers. Now if you had something very gay in the middle—wouldn't that look well, Mr. Scipio?"

"Sure!" said the old man, smiling. "How's dis now?"—and he set before Primrose a tall fuchsia, laden from root to top shoot with great blossoms of crimson and white.

"Why, it's perfectly beautiful!" cried Primrose in delight. "And will it flower so all the time, Mr. Scipio?"

"Won't catch him failing, so de little lady manage him right," said the old gardener.

"Oh, well, I'll take that, of course," answered Primrose. "But how am I to manage it?"

"Little ladies know how to fix de basket, fust of all?" said Scipio.

"Our brother is making it, you know," said Clover, "and then we were just going to fill it with earth and plants."

"'Fore you fill it," said the gardener, "have a hole or two made right t'rough de bottom. Den line de whole basket with moss, inch deep. Keep de plants from dryin' up."

"What a splendid way!" said Clover. "And what else, Mr. Scipio?"

"Basket hang in pretty warm place, likely?"

"Yes, it's pretty warm," said Primrose. "Jack says it's as cold as Greenland, but it's a great deal warmer than that."

"Mustn't freeze," said the gardener. "S'pose little ladies know dat."

"Oh yes, we know that," said Clover, "and there's no danger. It's to hang in our sitting-room."

"Bound to hang in de sun half de day," said old Scipio. "Can't have a good flower basket in de shade. Bound to water 'em every night, too."

"Why, that's oftener than we water our other plants," said Lily, putting her word in again. She had been rather silent for some time.

"Hangin' baskets jes' catch de dry air," said Scipio. "Want a good soakin' every night, or dey ain't worth a label."

"Well, that's easy," said Clover. "Thank you, Mr. Scipio, we won't forget. Prim, I think your fuchsia's splendid!"

"It does droop a little bit," said Primrose, still clinging to her favourite idea. "You see, Mr. Scipio, I wanted to come part way down to meet mamma."

"Little white blossom!" said the old man, smiling to himself. "*Dat's* what for she want to peep over de sides! See, see," and Scipio went slowly about the greenhouse, looking at this and that, and finally took down a small pot with a small

plant in it. "Dere," he said,—“little lady take dat home and put in her basket, and den she peep over much as she like.”

“Oh, what is that?” said Primrose. “Do you mean *instead* of my fuchsia, Mr. Scipio?”

“No ‘stead of’ at all,” said the old man. “Good little ting, dat; go its own way, and hab its own way, and never get in nobody’s way, neither. You plant de smilax to climb up, and de L’elegante to hang down, and de fuchsia to stand straight and joyful; and den you put in dis yere little feller to run over ‘em and into ‘em, and everybody de better, and nobody de wus.”

Primrose was delighted, and took the little plant in her hands with more thanks than she knew how to tell. Only the prudent Clover bethought herself of Prim’s little purse, and doubted very much whether it held enough to pay for both plants.

“I’ll pay for yours and mine, too, Prim,” she whispered, “and then you can settle with me when we get home.” But there was nothing extra to pay. The little plant was a gift—nothing less; and Prim drove off at last, too happy for anything. The four plants were safely tucked away in the box, out of reach of frost and wind; the children were half hidden among the fur robes. But so much happiness could only be silent. Nobody spoke much, and everybody thought a great deal; and when at

last they reached home, the children smuggled their treasures upstairs to Sam's room, and set them in a row on his table. There they stood—*Geranium peltatum* L'elegante, and *Myrsiphyllum asparagoides*, and *Fuchsia Carl Halt*, and *Convolvulus Mauritanicus*—the little stranger, which as yet made no show in the world.

"And I should think God would bless Mr. Scipio very much," said Primrose, "if he often makes people so happy for nothing."

CHAPTER XIV.

"AND so nobody chose Mrs. Pollock, after all," said Sam, surveying the row of little plants on the table.

"Yes, I chose her several times," said Lily, "but then I chose something else afterwards."

Prim opened her lips to speak, and then catching an anxious glance from Clover, she screwed them up tight again, and said nothing. Sam was surveying the children now as well as the plants.

"And how did you get your small self into the centre, little one?" he said.

"Oh, but my fuchsia won't be small by and by," said Prim eagerly. "Mr. Scipio said so. You see, Sam, dear, the big plants don't like to be transplanted so well."

"I have no doubt the fuchsia will do its duty," said Sam; "the only question is how it got there."

"Why, easy enough," broke in Lily. "The gardener said it would make a good show—and Prim wanted a show."

"And so you kindly gave up Mrs. Pollock and

the centre, and took to L'elegante and outside drapery," said Sam.

"No, I didn't at all," said Lily. "I liked this best, and so did Prim. I don't know but you'll think I was very selfish, Sam."

"I don't know but I shall. What are the facts of the case? Which place did you like best, Prim?"

"I didn't care so much about the place, at first," said Prim, "till Mr. Scipio brought out the elegant geranium, and then I liked *that* best. And I thought it would be so nice to climb 'way over, and hang down, and just touch mamma's head when she went by."

"Well, you didn't *say* all that till afterwards," said Lily.

"And, Sam, don't you think they're *all* lovely?" said Clover earnestly. "And do you think it matters so very much just which is which, or where one stands?"

"I think some things do not matter at all," said Sam. "And some things do."

"And I've got two plants—only think!" said Primrose. "Mr. Scipio gave me another all for myself—at least all for me and the basket. And we must put 'em in the very minute the basket's done. And the basket must have a hole in it."

"The basket has," said Sam, as he hid the little plants away where nobody should see them. But

wisely enough, he did not say that the basket was also done—quite finished in every respect. To-night sleep was the best thing. Next day, however, was a wonderful day. It was Saturday, and therefore without book hindrances; and Sam kindly gave up whatever private pleasure of his own might be on hand, and devoted himself to the children. So first there came an expedition to the woods after moss, all the sweeter because it promised to be the last for that winter, and not a bit the worse for the snow that had to be cleared away from the moss beds. The children came home to dinner with scarlet cheeks and dancing eyes, and appetites that needed no further excitement. All dinner time, as they might not whisper, the three laughed at each other with their eyes, and talked riddles about “business,” and “articles,” and “yours, Lily,” and “mine, you know.”

Then after dinner came the grand climax. All hands adjourned to the workshop for the lining and filling of the basket, and then Sam muffled it in a newspaper and carried it safely, unseen, upstairs to his own room. There the paper was spread on the floor with the basket in the middle, and the four little plants were carefully turned out of the pots and set in the brown earth. Carl Halt in the middle, and L'elegante at one side and the convolvulus at the other, and the pretty green smilax was pleasantly

established by one of the wires, where it could climb to its heart's content.

"There never was anything so pretty!" cried Primrose.

"Except the Jarvis's baskets," corrected Lily.

"Well, I don't think they were," said Primrose, "because this is our very own."

Sam had promised to guard the basket safely in his room, and gave general orders to the family that no one must go there without special permission. Besides the risk of discovery, he knew that it was better the plants should not be fussed with until they were fairly established in their new quarters.

Really, nobody had much time to go there, everybody found so much else to do. There was the daily care of the bulbs in the window, and the daily inspection of those in the cellar; and most of all there was work for Christmas. Where people have long purses Christmas is easy enough, but Prim's purse was not longer than her little finger—so what was she to do?

"I *must* have something for Sam, you know," she said to Clover; "and then there's Lily and Jack—and I'd like to give 'em all flowers." And all the while Prim was looking earnestly at Clover, and wondering what she could possibly give *her*.

"You might buy Lily a hyacinth in a glass," said Clover. "I saw some pretty ones at the greenhouse

the other day, and they were only fifteen cents, and the glass was twenty-five."

"But maybe she wouldn't leave it in the glass," said Primrose; "she might take it out and experiment it in a pot."

"Oh, I don't believe she would," said Clover, laughing; "but if you don't like that, you might get a little basket to pick flowers in."

"Yes, that will do," said Primrose. "Now for Jack."

"How much can you spend upon Jack?" said Clover.

"Not much," said Primrose; "I don't believe he can have more than ten cents for his share. You see I've got so little."

"Well, if you'll take ten cents," said Clover, "I'll add twenty to that, and we'll send to Mr. Vick for one of those funny little bouquet-holders; see, here it is in the catalogue—a little bit of a bottle to hold the stems of the flowers, fastened to a long pin that sticks into your dress. Jack will put it on his vest and feel grand."

"And maybe he'll learn to let flowers alone, then," said Primrose; "other people's flowers, I mean. I think that is excellent. O Clover! I'd like to give Sam everything!"

"So would I," said Clover.

"But I've only twenty-five cents left!" said

Primrose dolefully, as she emptied her little purse on the table,—“after ten for Jack. And, oh, there’s Lily’s basket!”

“You might make Lily something, if you have no money,” said Clover. “Make her a box to put her seeds in; I’ll help you.”

“You’re always so good!” said Primrose, wrapping her arms around her sister. “But how can you make a box? Lily’s got plenty of boxes, too.”

“I mean arrange it,” said Clover.

“Now?” said Prim.

“Yes, if you like,” said Clover, smothering a sigh over a delightful book she just wanted to finish; “but we must ask mamma for a box and some mucilage. I’ve got coloured paper.”

At the name of coloured paper, Prim’s face brightened wonderfully, and the afternoon and the box were a great success.

The box itself, to begin with, was one in which stockings had been sent home; long and rather deep for its breadth, and covered on the outside with fresh green paper. Clover brought the old cover of another box, and after measuring and considering she cut it into three pieces. Each piece was then trimmed off until it was as deep as the first box, but a little wider, so that to slip down into it each end of the piece must be folded back for half an inch. The first piece was put down exactly in the middle

of the box—Clover had out her little ivory rule and measured everything. Then the turned-down strips were laid smoothly back against the sides of the box and sewed firmly through and through to it, the stitches being all in an erect line up and down which Clover first marked out with her pencil. This divided the box into two parts. Then the other two bits of pasteboard were fastened in like manner, one exactly in the middle of each of the two parts, and behold a box with four nice roomy divisions. Primrose was delighted.

“Oh, but it is not done yet,” said Clover, when Prim wanted to run off at once and exhibit it to Sam.

The next thing was to line each compartment smoothly with rose-coloured paper, gumming it fast with mucilage. Then Clover cut narrow strips of gilt paper and covered her lines of stitching on the outside of the box, and put a border of the same round the cover.

“And now,” she said, “it is all done but finishing.”

“Finishing!” cried Primrose. “Why, what more *can* you do to it? It’s perfectly beautiful!”

Clover hunted up an old catalogue, and cut out neatly and carefully the words “biennials and perennials,” then two “annuals,” then one “vines and climbers.” These were now glued on between

the gilt strips outside, evenly and straight, the "biennials" at one end and the "vines" at the other, and the two "annuals" in the middle.

"Because she has most of those, you know," said Clover. "And now, Prim, we must put her name on the cover."

"Well that's easy," said Primrose. "It don't take long to write 'Lily,' I'm sure."

"I'm not going to write it," said Clover. "I'm going to cut a real lily out of this catalogue and paste it on."

"Take a tiger lily," said Prim. "That's what papa called her."

"Oh no, not that," said Clover. "See—we'll put this beauty of a white one. Because we all want to be this."

And Clover cut out the white lily and pasted it on the top of the cover, and the box was done.

CHAPTER XV.

It would be hard to describe the whole of that Christmas, or to half tell how pleasant it was. To begin with, only for the white carpets that were everywhere spread out of doors, and the bright fires that danced and crackled within, one could hardly tell what time of year it was. For the breakfast room was gay with flowers, and quite bedecked with all sorts of floral appliances and contrivances and delights. Of course the children had enjoyed the delightful mystery of stockings hung up and well filled,—all that came first, and passed off in the early morning twilight; the breakfast room surprise was quite an extra.

Now the children thought they had all the fun to themselves. Behold them, then, the moment the breakfast bell rang, in grand procession; Lily and Clover carrying the hanging basket between them, and Prim running on before to clap her hands and enjoy the world generally. It was like Clover to turn the side where were the ivy geranium and *Convolvulus Mauritanicus* to the front, leaving her

own beloved green smilax in the shady background. Already the basket looked very pretty, so well had the little plants thriven under Sam's judicious care, and Carl Halt had even a dozen bright blossoms—much to Prim's delight. Lily had prepared quite a presentation speech.

"Mamma," she said, "this is only a basket of promises, you see, as yet; there's two from Primrose, and one from Clover, and one from me. And Sam made the basket. And we hope it will be splendid, all winter. Because it's just full of our love, mamma."

"And we couldn't seem to find plants that were pretty enough, mamma," said Primrose, "for we wanted the very best there were. But Mr. Scipio says these will grow."

Somehow to Clover's lips the words did not come; and only the lips trembled a little, as she glanced at her mother, and stood there quiet and silent behind her smilax. And whatever the reason was, Mrs. May did not speak either, at first. The flowers, the basket, and the three children, made a wonderful group to her eyes, and she could only look.

"I'll take t'other plant," said Jack audaciously. "That little one running away down this side. You see, mamma, it's modest, and looks like me."

"It don't look a bit more like you than it looks like my cat," said Lily, "nor half as much. And

that's Prim's. You're too late, sir, to have a hand in *this* basket."

"I'll have two hands about it, then," said Jack; "I'll keep it watered. May I, mamma?"

"Till the first day you forget it," said Mrs. May. And she followed the children to the window, where Sam was already putting in a strong hook to hold the basket. But the windows! Oh, there was a general outcry then. Certainly no one had ever seen them look so before. In the first place, over each was a name in letters of moss and ground pine; in the middle, "Clover," with "Lily" on one side and "Primrose" on the other. The three were not far apart, for these windows were just the three divisions of the great bow window of the breakfast room. Then, in each one stood a dainty little green flower stand—a wooden frame, with a railing of wire network; and higher up was a bracket on each side of each window—pretty little affairs, of dark wood, and quite able to hold two flower-pots apiece. These were empty. But the stands looked quite full.

"How splendid!" cried Lily, rushing up to hers. A neat box was in the stand, fitting it well, and the box was full of earth, and in the box were bulbs. Round the outside crocuses, and then scilla and snowdrops, and then tulips. Lily almost danced for joy. For by this time, even to *her* perception, the experiment was a failure; and between experi-

ments and mice, Lily's first set of bulbs were nowhere; that is, for purposes of beauty and pleasure.

Clover's table was somewhat differently filled. There was indeed a group of plants: a white bouvardia, a white jasmine, and a very fine "Mrs. Pollock;" but these took only a part of the space. By them lay a pair of beautiful little pruning shears with a sliding joint, an indelible garden pencil, and a white shell mounted as a flower dish.

On Prim's table was another indelible pencil (Lily found one too, tucked away among her bulbs), a great bunch of labels cut all of a size and neatly finished, a little green box that plainly held something, and a pretty triple hyacinth glass, holding three hyacinths in full progress. And the little box was found to contain a delightful "Moore's Floral Set,"—the prettiest small rake and spade and hoe and fork imaginable.

Over each flower stand hung a small empty flower-basket, and under Lily's table, and under Clover's swung a great bunch of labels like Prim's.

"I whittled 'em out for you my own self, every one," Jack said with some pride.

Breakfast was only an impertinence this morning! Even Jack would have postponed—even waffles!—if he could. Jack felt extremely grand with his

bouquet holder, which Clover had furnished with a rose geranium leaf, and he strutted about declaring himself far sweeter than anybody else. Lily was delighted with her seed-box, and at once brought out a most rough-and-tumble collection of seed-bags—half full, a quarter full, and empty—and began to bestow them in proper order and place. And Prim sat down on the floor, and bringing her imagination to bear upon the carpet, softly touched it with her lovely new little tools, and found out even so what grand work they would do in her garden. As for Clover, she stood smelling the white bouvardia and the jasmine by turns, and gazing at the crimson splashes on Mrs. Pollock's broad leaves, quite too happy to speak. Over all swung the great basket, rejoicing in the Christmas sun.

"So much! so much!" thought Clover to herself. "Oh, I ought to do a great deal of good with so much pleasure!" And bending there over her flowers, Clover prayed in her heart that she might do with them, and might be in herself, just what would best please the Lord whose love had given and made them all.

"I wonder what Maria Jarvis will say now," quoth Lily from her table; "four baskets and three tables!"

"Strange Mr. Vick don't answer your letter!" said Jack, who had to tease, if it *was* Christmas

Day. "I suppose he's so busy changing all his arrangements, and extending his south front, that he hasn't time."

"Don't you worry about his letter till it comes," said Lily.

"There'll be no need for me to worry *after* it comes," said Jack, "because you'll do that."

"I shan't at all," said Lily. "And I daresay he's had hundreds of bulbs eaten up by mice, besides."

"The experiment was the most expensive of the two, wasn't it?" said Jack.

"Jack," said Lily seriously, "every time you talk so, the pin of that bouquet-holder ought to stick straight in and prick you!"

"I just wish one thing," said Jack, sighing deeply. "If only Polly Nar could have lived to see this day!

"Poor Polly Nar!
Poor Polly Nar!
She died a week too soon, O!"

"Jack, come to breakfast at once," said his mother, —and down went seed-bags and tools for the present.

"Just look at our hanging baskets!" said Clover, eyeing them lovingly from the table.

"But whatever shall we put in them?" said Lily.

"Ah, that you must consider about," said Sam. "I left them empty on purpose that you might exercise your own skill and taste and ingenuity."

"Did *you* make them, Sam?" said Clover.

"I made them."

"I'm so glad!"

"Sam, dear," said little Primrose, "do you think mignonette would be pretty in mine?"

"Mignonette is pretty anywhere."

"I was thinking," said Prim, with the old dreamy look on her little face, "that if I put a red plant in the middle it might have a border of green mignonette."

"What red plant?" said Mr. May.

"I don't know, papa, it had a terribly long name, but I remember the plant."

"She knows it by sight, sir, but can't introduce it," said Jack.

"Sam," said Clover, "what did you mean by 'exercising our ingenuity' to fill our baskets? I don't see how that is to help."

"Nor I," said Lily; "unless he means that we can imagine little jobs to do for papa, and get him to pay us. Then we could buy plants."

"I beg you will do nothing of the kind," said Mr. May, laughing. "'Imagine little jobs that I am to pay for!' I assure you there are real jobs enough that I must pay for already."

"And I meant nothing of the kind," said Sam. "I know you children have empty purses just now, as well as empty baskets, and I want to see how you will contrive to fill the one with no help from the other. Think about it. To-day, you know, you have nothing else to do."

CHAPTER XVI.

"NOTHING else to do!" Was there ever a much greater mistake? But then, as Prim remarked, "boys are always making mistakes." It seemed indeed (except in the matter of weeds) as if the winter garden would not fall far behind the summer garden in point of work. There were first the bulbs in the cellar to be watched and visited daily; some one of them, every now and then, getting leave to quit its long imprisonment and come forth into the sunshine. Then there were the bulbs in the window, placed now, with great joy, in the new flower-stands, having their hearts' content of light and air and water. As to the attention they received, there was no measuring *that*. Not once, but twenty times a day, did the little feet come to the window, pattering about with an eager business tread that was pleasant to hear. Every morning—and sometimes every night as well—the pots were turned round, that the shoots might grow straight as well as tall; for even Lily was convinced, by Jack's ridicule of her own experience, that it was

bad for "Polly Nar" to lie down quite so flat and quite so often. Then as the shoots grew, the old work of sticks and bass mat and tying up began again; only the hyacinths in glasses must needs have wire supports. An end of wire twisted round the neck of the glass, and the other end carried up straight for a few inches, with a small wire loop to hold the stem of the plant. This gave it support, without interfering with the free growth, or looking stiff. Then water must be given, regularly and plentifully, so that the earth was never either dry or soaked; and the hyacinth glasses needed filling up now and then. Sam put a little powdered charcoal in each glass, and soon it sunk to the bottom, leaving no sign but a thin black layer that indeed hardly showed at all. But it kept the water fresh and sweet, so that the glasses need never be emptied, but only replenished once in a while.

"Keep them just so full that the bottom of the bulb will almost or *just* touch the water," said Sam; "and when the sun is *very* bright, it will do them no harm to wrap a thick paper around the lower part of the glass. Roots expect to live in the dark, and it agrees with them."

The children at once made jackets of brown paper for the hyacinth glasses, though Lily declared she thought it was a great deal of useless trouble.

"I don't see why roots should have what they expect, any more than other people," she said; "and this won't make it very dark, anyway." However, she submitted. Lily had got almost enough of her own wisdom, for once; so in that respect, perhaps, the experiments had been a good thing.

Then it was wonderful pleasure every day to assist at the watering of *the* basket—to see Jack carefully take it down (for Jack could be careful when he thought it worth his while), then to follow in train to the bath-room, and stand by while basket and plants got a thorough showering; this was quite delightful. Every leaf glistened with comfort and pleasure, and every flower looked brighter than before. For there were flowers now, more than ever, on Carl Halt; and the little convolvulus had put out several fair blue-purple blossoms. L'elegante, indeed, was not in bloom; but its abundant foliage, each green leaf bordered with white and touched with pink, could not fail to satisfy everybody; and no one could possibly find fault with the smilax, which was climbing as fast as it could, and as gracefully as few things can. I must say that Lily enjoyed the hanging-basket more than anything else now, for almost all her other ventures had failed utterly; and though the Christmas set were flourishing, still none of them were in bloom; and in her own private mind, Lily felt rather disgusted with

bulbs just now, and thought they had no business to refuse to try experiments in such fashion.

Meantime the others, treated in the common place and common sense way, were doing full justice to their bringing up. It had been thought that Christmas was perfect—but who shall tell how everybody felt on New Year's morning, when Prim's double Roman Narcissus opened the first of its white buds, breathing fragrance! Nothing would do but to wash the pot very clean and set it on the breakfast table. And then suddenly Sam came in with three beautiful lattice-work covers in his hand, which would fit any of their flower-pots, and gave one to each of the children—white to Primrose, green to Clover, and red to Lily—so that whoever had a plant fit to grace the table, might have also a fitting dress for the flower-pot. Nothing could be more complete; and the sweet, spicy fragrance of the Polyanthus Narcissus, hovering about the breakfast-table, was the pleasantest thing that could be.

"And now I suppose we shall have flowers every day," said Primrose, folding her hands with a sigh of content.

Well, it was not quite that, and yet perhaps it was all the better that the flowers did not come *every* day, for now there was a succession of surprises. One day the little crocus, dark-blue King William, would show the mere tip of a purple bud,

nestling down among the sharp green leaves, and perhaps the very next morning the bud would have shot quite up into the light, there proceeding to open out into a lovely full-blown flower, with deep pencillings of colour and feathery-fringed stamens.

"But it isn't *blue*," said Primrose, when she had exhibited her crocus for the twentieth time, and felt at leisure to criticise. "It isn't blue one bit!"

"Blue for a crocus," suggested Sam.

"Blue for a crocus?" repeated Prim, who was by no means grown up to such sophistries. "I should think it was purple for a crocus, for my part. What's the use of disappointing people, Sam, dear?"

Sam laughed, catching his little sister in his arms and giving her a toss to his shoulder.

"You don't mean to say that King William disappoints you, after all?" he said. "Look down at him now."

"Oh, he's perfectly lovely!" said Prim, "if he is purple. But won't any of 'em be blue, Sam?"

"I'm afraid not true blue. True blue is the rarest colour among flowers."

"Then they might as well say so, at once, and not pretend," said Prim.

"But it's not King William's fault," said Sam. "And the purple is a bluish purple, and if you choose to call it a purplish blue"——

"I don't," said Primrose energetically. "Blue's

blue, and it isn't purple. But, O Sam! I do believe there's a white crocus bud coming up now!"

"Not a doubt of it. By to-morrow 'Pigeon' will unfurl her white wings."

"*Are they white?*" said Primrose. "*Quite white, Sam, dear?*"

"Well, Prim, dear, truth obliges me to confess that they have a few dark feathers," said Sam. "But only just enough to set off the white. Not striped all over, like Sir Walter Scott."

"So blue's purple, and white is striped," said Primrose. "I shouldn't wonder a bit if Sir Walter Scott came out spotted!"

However, he did not, and was besides so very large, that he was a wonder as well as a beauty.

Then the little Van Thol tulips began to show colour. First the gold striped, then the scarlet, and then the yellow. And then up came a green bud which seemed slowly to turn white in the sunshine.

"I *planted* rose-colour in that pot," said Clover doubtfully, wondering with herself if rose colour meant white, as blue meant purple.

Very white the little tulip looked for several days. But one morning as Clover took a side view of her flower-stand from some little distance, behold over the white tulip lay a faint glow, the lightest possible veil of pink. Clover sprang to the window.

"O mamma!" she cried, "my tulip is turning rose colour! O Lily! just come and look!"

"Nonsense," said Lily, with all the calmness of superior knowledge. "Turning rose colour, indeed! As if tulips ever did such things."

"Well, come and see for yourself," said Clover. "It certainly is, whether they do or not."

Lily, however, was not of the mind that seeing is believing. It was the reflection from the window curtain, she said. Or the tulip was sickly, and going to die. The catalogue had doubtless made a mistake. Clover gave up the argument, but not her patient daily watch by the window. And day by day the watch was rewarded. So far from being sickly, the little tulip grew larger and larger, the veil of pink grew deeper and clearer; until the rose-coloured Van Thol stood decked in all its charms; the very prettiest thing, Clover declared, that ever was.

"It is a true beauty, my dear. I congratulate you," Mr. May said. "Well grown, well cared for, a perfect specimen. I should like to see my children just like that tulip in all its essential characteristics."

"What are characteristics, papa?" said little Primrose.

"Those qualities which distinguish it, whether from other flowers or other tulips," said Mr. May.

"If your children are not well cared for, it's a

pity," said Jack. "Mamma don't try experiments with *her* hardy bulbs."

"Papa," said Primrose, "would you like to have us hardy bulbs?"

"Yes," said Mr. May, "hardy enough to do your proper work at the proper time, without regard to wind and weather."

"Papa, I'm sure I'm well grown," said Lily, "if that's all."

"That is not quite all," said Mr. May; "the tulip seems to grow more and more modest, even as it grows more and more worthy to be looked at. Sometimes I miss the pink veil, Lily."

And Mr. May gave her a kiss and went away.

CHAPTER XVII.

"MAMMA," said Primrose, "it's a great, great while since we heard a story!"

The day was certainly suggestive of stories; with a fast falling, ever coming white curtain of snow, that reached down from sky to earth, and seemed to unroll, and unroll, and unroll in an endless way.

Indoors indeed things were different. The fire had never burned better, the fuchsia blossoms hung cheery and bright, the hyacinth bells stood firm in their pink and white beauty, but the crocuses shut themselves up tight and chose to wait for clear weather.

Much in that fashion felt Primrose, leaning her elbows on her mother's lap, and gazing at her own particular hyacinth with a certain dreamy wonder. Prim felt, so shut up herself, and shut in, and shut out too (from sundry things she wanted to do), that she could not quite understand the calm hyacinths.

"So you want a story," said Mrs. May, whose needle was flying steadily in and out. "A story about what, pray?"

"Oh, about flowers, *of course*," said Prim. "I should like to know what flowers think about all day long."

"I can tell you what it would be if they thought at all," said Mrs. May: "their duty and how to do it. As it is, I suppose they do it without thinking."

"Wouldn't they ever think about being pretty?" said Primrose, who had once in a while a slight leaning that way herself.

"Some of them whose duty it was to look pretty."

"O mamma! It couldn't be any flower's duty to look ugly!"

"I do not think any flower ever does," said Mrs. May, smiling. "Not really ugly. It seems to be the duty of some flowers to look only plain."

"But do let us have the story, mamma!" said Lily.

"Choose your flower, then."

"Oh, can it be about any flower we like?" said Lily. "How delightful! Let's have petunias."

"Oh, *please* don't take petunias!" cried Prim. "I am sure we saw enough of them last summer. I don't like petunias. I think it was nice of the frost to kill 'em off."

"I think you're very ungrateful," said Lily. "You used to be glad enough to get 'em last summer, when you had the dish to dress."

"Well, but I'm not dressing the dish now," said

Prim. "And I wasn't glad then, only in that dry, dry time, when the nice flowers withered all up."

"Petunia had some good qualities," said Mrs. May; "and one was, that she did not easily 'wither all up,' as you say, Prim."

"A real girl called Petunia?" said Prim, interested in the story at once.

"What a splendid name!" said Lily. "I think I shall call my oldest daughter Petunia."

"O Lily!" said Clover.

"Well, I'm glad your name won't be May, then," said Primrose. "And I hope she won't run all over everything and everybody."

"Mamma," said Clover, "how *could* a girl 'wither up'?"

"I've seen girls do it," said Mrs. May. "If the sun was a little bit too hot, or the wind a little bit too cold, or they could not get a drink just at the right minute; in short, if anything went any way but just right, behold their pretty faces wrinkled up in no time. Their heads hung down, their smiles fled away; and all anybody could say of them was, 'what a pity!'"

"Ahem!" said Lily, "we all know one girl who does *that*. Somebody we go to see, Clover. You know."

"Hush, hush," said Mrs. May, "we will not apply the story to any of our friends. But it was un-

doubtedly one of Petunia's virtues, that she could bear a good many small trials with a clear face. She did not shut up her eyes the minute the sun went under a cloud, like the convolvulus, nor refuse to open them at all in a rainy day like the portulaca."

"Mamma, just one minute," said Primrose. "You don't mean my little convolvulus—your little convolvulus—up here in the basket?"

"Not at all. I am talking of another branch of the family. It was chiefly Petunia's duty to paint her face, and this duty she performed in the most exemplary and startling manner."

"Exemplary and startling!" Lily repeated. "Well!"

"Yes," said Mrs. May with a smile, "for it was never two days alike. Now a purple spot in the middle."

"Right on her nose!" cried Prim.

"Be quiet," said Lily. "Petunias haven't got noses."

"And sometimes a stripe on one side, and sometimes a stripe on the other. Now she was half red, and now all white."

"Well, I'm sure that was nice," said Lily. "I like a change."

"Yes," said Mrs. May, "but not always, and not every day. You admire the stripes and colours one

morning, and then going out the next morning to admire the same, find they have vanished. Nothing was steady with Petunia; nothing could last. In fact, she was always trying experiments."

"Now, mamma," said Lily, blushing a little, "I don't think that's like me. I know I do like to try experiments."

"And you're always parting your hair different ways," said Primrose. "And sometimes you sleep crosswise, and sometimes you put your head down at the foot."

"It is like you to be good-natured, though," said Clover, "and not shut up your eyes because it's cloudy."

"Here's for somebody!" shouted Jack, bursting into the room, cap on and mittens off, and every appearance of a boy who had been snow-balling himself as well as other people. In his hand he held a deep, round paper box.

"Jack! Jack!" said his mother.

"Beg pardon, mamma," and Jack ducked his head, adroitly jerking the snowy cap off down to the floor. "Didn't know you were here, ma'am. Mamma, don't you think *I'm* the 'white blossom' at present? Prim's blue, and Lily's green"——

"Oh, *I'm* the white blossom!" cried Prim, springing up. "Mr. Scipio says so. O Jack! what have you got?"

"You white?" said Jack contemptuously; "you're as blue as your eyes!"

"Oh, but let me see!" said Primrose. "I *know* it's for me. Did Mr. Scipio send it, Jack?"

"What's that to you?" said Jack, balancing the box on the top of his head and marching round the room.

"Mamma! mamma!" Prim said in a very uncomfortable voice.

"Take care," said Lily; "*Petunias* never wrinkle up."

Prim's face smoothed immediately.

"I should be sorry if I could not behave better than they can," she said. "But, O Jack! I do think you might give me my box!"

"So do I," said Clover, and softly getting behind Jack as he marched about, Clover caught the box from his head before he could stop her, and put it instantly in Mrs. May's lap.

"Now, mamma, see, please," she said.

"Clever, but risky," said Jack, shaking his head threateningly at his older sister. "Look out for yourself, Miss Clo', after this."

"The box," said Mrs. May, "is addressed 'To the little white blossom, with compliments of old Scip.'"

Prim's eyes glowed as she took the box into her hands, and sat down on the floor at Mrs. May's feet to examine it. But when the cover was taken off,

everybody cried out at once ; for there came forth such a breath of violets, roses, geraniums, and heliotropes, that everybody was well nigh bewildered. First appeared a bat of cotton (with which, indeed, the box was lined), and then cut flowers—roses, sprigs of geranium, sprigs of myrtle, with all sorts of sweet and dainty smaller sprays, which the children did not know. Underneath all, quite at the bottom and snugly bedded in the white cotton, lay three camellias, one scarlet and two white.

Prim was beside herself with joy, and even Jack forgot teasing for the time in admiration.

"What lovely sprigs!" exclaimed Clover. "Now,"—but she checked herself.

"Yes, to be sure, so we can," said Lily ; "now we can fill our hanging-baskets."

"Prim can fill hers beautifully," said Clover, "and that will be a nice beginning."

"Prim fill hers?" echoed Lily. "Why, here's enough to fill ten baskets."

"Yes, but," said Clover softly, drawing Lily aside and pointing down to the absorbed little child on the floor, "don't you see? She's perfectly wrapped up in them. I would not take even one for anything."

"Let her keep 'em all?" said Lily. "Why, you'll make the child so selfish there'll be no standing her."

"But they are hers to keep, if she chooses," said

Clover; "and you know we don't want to be selfish either."

"Selfish? No!" said Lily; "but there's sense in things. Mamma!"——

"Clover," said her mother, "if you will go to the closet and bring out some of the flat flower-dishes, and you, Lily, will get some water, Prim can put her beauties out of danger at once. They will wilt very fast in this room."

So still on the floor, and with the others bending round to look, Prim began slowly and thoughtfully to fill the dishes, thinking over Lily's words the while. For she had heard them every one. Must she give away half of her flowers—no, two-thirds? And which should she give? There were three camellias indeed, but only one was red. If she gave that away, she would have no red one for herself. If she kept it, she would have no white.

Then these other sprigs and things. Two carnations, and five roses, and four bits of heliotrope, and one Cape jessamine,—there was no possibility of an equal division of these. And which would grow in her basket? and how many would grow at all? Was ever a box of sweet flowers so mixed up with difficult questions? Prim stuck in the last flower of her first dish with a very long-drawn sigh indeed. She looked up, but there was nobody there but her mother. Mrs. May sat quietly sewing as before, but the rest had stolen away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"RICHES bring care," said Mrs. May, smiling down at her little daughter. "Even flower riches."

"Mamma," said Primrose, "it's not the flowers. I wasn't sighing over *them*."

"Only over the care."

"No, I like the care," said Primrose; "it makes me feel good. Only you see I want the *whole* of it, mamma!" And Prim knit her brows and stared into the box of flowers as if her thoughts were in a very mixed-up state indeed.

"The whole of the care?" said Mrs. May. "You seem to have that, little daughter."

"Yes, mamma," said Prim with a deep sigh. "But you see I want the whole of the flowers."

"Oh, that is it!" said her mother. "Then I am afraid I cannot give any help. So intricate a case can only be unravelled by one's self."

"You might tell me what to do, mamma," said Primrose. "I thought you would."

"On no account," said Mrs. May. "I never like to give needless advice."

"But it *isn't* needless," said Prim. "What makes you call it needless, mamma?"

"Advice is always needless when the person to be advised either has made, or can make, up his mind properly without it."

"Make up his mind properly," repeated Prim, gazing once more down into the depths of her flower-box. "That means the right way. Mamma, my mind isn't made up at all. And I don't know what the right way is."

"Are you sure?"

But Prim did not answer that. Somehow, when the question was raised, she began to feel an uncomfortable suspicion that she *did* know. She went on thoughtfully taking the flowers out from their cotton bed, and arranging them in the dishes.

"Mamma," she said at last, "do you mean that I ought to give Clover half, and Lily half of the other half?"

"Why should Clover have twice as much as Lily?"

"Twice as much, would that be?" said Prim. "I thought I was giving all just alike. How then, mamma? let 'em both come and arrange 'em?" said Prim, suddenly stopping her work.

"That would be hardly fair to Primrose," said Mrs. May. "Nor to Mr. Scipio, who sent her the flowers."

"He did send 'em to me, for my very self," said

Prim. And the work went on again. Oh! the roses were so sweet! Prim laid them softly against her cheek, and almost kissed them one by one. Then the troublesome thoughts began to come back.

"Mamma, do you know what Clover and Lily like particularly?" and Prim put a lovely Astoria carnation in the dish, deciding that at least she could not give *that* away.

"Not particularly," said Mrs. May. There was another pause.

"Mamma, you said we ought to hedge our gardens with the golden rule?"

"Yes, that is true."

"And our winter flowers, too?" said Primrose.

"The Lord does not speak of any special time," said Mrs. May. "He merely says 'whatsoever.' I suppose that, without any qualification, must mean 'whensoever,' too."

"But, mamma, I might like to have Lily give me the whole boxful, if they were hers." And Prim sat up again, and surveyed her flowers with a rueful face.

"The words do not mean that sort of liking," said Mrs. May. "'Whatsoever ye would,'—properly! justly, reasonably,—'that men should do unto you.' You might want me to give you my hanging-basket, but no golden rule would require me to do it, unless, if places were changed, I could properly want you to do the same for me."

"I see," said Prim. And then for some time once more the work went on in grave silence. Flower after flower and spray after spray,—roses, heliotropes, geraniums,—how sweet they all were! Mrs. May presently laid down her work and went away, leaving her little daughter to work out the problem herself alone. And then, as often happened, Prim began to talk quietly to herself.

"You must go in there, Mr. Carnation," she said, "close by Mrs. Heliotrope. Now I couldn't properly want Lily to let me arrange 'em if they were hers, you see, so it's proper I should do it myself. So, Miss Rose, I shall put you there, by the geranium leaf. Oh, it's ever so many leaves—a whole sprig! I guess that would grow splendidly. And here's some more. Lily wanted some of these big pieces for her hanging-basket. I wonder if that was proper—I mean if she'd asked me nicely? If I should say, 'if places were changed,' 'Lily, can you spare just a little bit of something for my basket?' and then I'd try to make it grow, I think that would be proper," said Primrose, surveying one of her camellias with her head on one side. "Oh, dear! I'm afraid I should want a camellia, too, for my very own. And I don't know whether that would be proper or not!"

Problems are difficult things!

Then, to her great relief, came a step along the hall.

"Sam, dear ! O Sam, *please* come here !" she called. And Sam came in, taking a pleased survey of the picture before him.

"What now ?" he said ; "you look like Proserpine as I last saw her, set in flowers."

"Who was Proserpine ?"

"Only a marble bust—not quite so much like you as the flowers are like the flowers."

"Well, Sam, dear," said Primrose, "the flowers are a great puzzle."

"A sweet one," said Sam. "Do all the roses insist upon having the best place ?"

"No, oh no !" said Primrose. "They're just as good as they can be. But this is the trouble, Sam—how many flowers would Lily give me if they were hers ?"

"Ah, that I cannot say," said Sam. "If you had asked about Clover, I could have told better."

"Could you ?" said Prim, with a wistful look. "Would she give me a great many ?"

"I think she would bid you help yourself."

"Do you ?" said Prim. "Would she ?"

"I know she never has flowers, of any sort, without sharing them with somebody."

"And if she did, would it be proper for me to help myself ?" queried Primrose.

"Very proper—if you did it sparingly."

"Sparingly?" Primrose repeated; "I don't know what 'sparingly' means, Sam."

"If you helped yourself sparingly," said Sam "you would 'spare'—that is, not take—all the flowers that you thought Clover particularly liked, and the most part of the others."

"I see," said Primrose gravely; "just a few little bits that weren't worth much I might take. Will they do so, if I call them?"

"I cannot answer for what all people will do," said Sam, laughing a little. "All we can manage is to do well ourselves."

Primrose drew a long breath.

"Sam, dear," she said, "please open the door and call 'em down. This business may as well be settled at once."

If Sam smiled again at that, he did not let his little sister see it. He opened the door and gave the desired call, and Lily came flying downstairs, and Clover came softly in, a minute or two later.

"Girls," said Primrose, "I think I ought to give you some of my flowers; and I'd rather have you choose 'em at once, before they're all in the dishes—because then it will make holes to pull 'em out." And Primrose leaned back against a chair that stood near, and apparently abstracted her mind from all sublunary concerns.

"Oh, that's delightful," said Lily, crouching down

by the flowers. "I thought Sam would say so. How many can you spare, Prim."

"Take what you want."

"Dear me," said Lily, "I want so much. Here's a cactus and another queer red thing, and this white"——

"Oh, but, Lily!" said Clover, coming round to the other side, "don't touch any of those! Mr. Scipio sent *her* the flowers, and she ought to arrange them every one. If there were one or two little bits of green you could spare, dear, that we might plant for our baskets. Don't you mean to plant some for your own?"

"Oh, to be sure I do!" said Primrose, rousing up. "I forgot all about it. But if it's only green stuff you want, that's easy. See, here's plenty. There, Lily, you may have that—and that—and that. And you may have these beautiful thick leaves, Clover—the stem's so short for my dish. See, there's three or four pieces."

Sam looked on and said nothing, till the distribution was made.

"How will you plant your cuttings?" he asked them.

"Why, in pots," said Primrose.

"I shall put mine right in my basket," said Lily. "Then they won't lose any time nor be any trouble."

"Whoever undertakes to raise flowers without

both time and trouble, will find his experiment a failure," said Sam. "However, every one to his mind about that. But the best way to strike cuttings that I know is in a saucer of sand."

"Oh, that is new, too," said Clover. "I'll do that."

"New to me until lately," said Sam. "Fill a common saucer with white sand; set your cuttings in that; keep the sand always as wet as mud, and in the fullest sunshine you can get. The cuttings will root quicker and make stronger plants than in any other way."

Well, there is nothing like something new, after all. Primrose joyfully finished her dishes and set them in place, and then the children gathered about Sam, and took a new lesson in the art of making cuttings. The three saucers of sand were brought and given the sunniest place on the three flower-stands; and now there was something new to watch and care for; for Sam warned them that the sand must never be allowed to get dry.

"Clover," he whispered to her, as he was inspecting the three saucers when the work was done, "did Prim give you nothing but these?"

"Hush!—no," said Clover softly.

"There is only one kind."

"She did not notice," said Clover. "She thought they were such pretty leaves. And so they are."

"The worst of it is," said Sam, examining the cuttings, "the wood is all old wood—too old to strike well, I'm afraid. I doubt if one of them will grow, my dear, with all your care."

Clover's face fell a little, and for a minute she looked much disappointed.

"Never mind," she said then gently, "Prim did not know. And she had not a great deal to give away, without spoiling her dishes. And maybe some of them will grow. I'll do my best. Only don't tell Prim, and spoil all her pleasure."

Sam laid his hands lovingly on the gentle face, and then stooped down and put his lips there too.

"Children," he said, standing up then, and turning to the others, "there is one verse in the Bible I wish you to learn and take to heart: 'Better is an handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.'"

CHAPTER XIX.

"SAND gardens, eh?" said Mr. May, inspecting the flower-stands one morning. "Inexpensive, to say the least."

"They're not gardens at all," said Lily; "we're striking cuttings, papa."

"What do the cuttings say to such treatment?"

"Oh, they like it, papa," said Primrose, "ever so much."

"You see, papa," put in Lily, "you just make the sand into mud, and then keep it in the hot sun all the time."

"Indeed! Pray where do you find 'a hot sun' in January?"

"Well, the hottest you can get," said Lily.

"The brightest, papa," said Clover. "They must have all the sun they can."

"And, O papa!" said Primrose eagerly, "just think—one of my cuttings has made a plant already!"

"It's a tissue of wonderful things, Prim, isn't it?"

"Yes, papa. Sam said he *thought* it had struck because it had begun to grow."

"What is the difference between 'striking' and 'growing'?" said Mr. May. "Enlighten me, Prim."

"Papa, the cutting has to strike root down at the end that's in the sand, you know, but Sam meant it was beginning to grow at the top."

"And that is almost a sure sign it has taken root, papa," said Clover.

"So, papa," Prim went on, "Sam told me that I might lift this one just a little way out of the sand, and look. And, papa, it had three roots just like little white threads, sticking out every way. Oh, I was so glad!"

"How could three roots stick out 'every way'?" inquired her father, laughing. "What have you done with the successful cutting, Prim?"

"Oh, *that* was a geranium," said the little girl contentedly, "and I've put it in the very littlest pot I had, at first. Sam said so. And then, when it gets established; you know, papa, it's to go in the middle of my hanging-basket."

"Poor little cutting!" said Mr. May, "never at rest anywhere. To be established is to be at once removed—is that the rule?"

"But it's *very* happy, papa!" said Prim, looking rather wistfully at the minute green leaves that

were beginning to uncurl and open out at the top of the small cutting.

"I am glad to know the fact."

"And I've got two more to transplant this very day," said Prim.

"And so have I," said Lily, lifting them uncere-
moniously out of the wet sand, and displaying
several promising white roots. "Look, papa."

"I see. But do cutting roots enjoy such hand-
ling?" as Lily thrust them down again out of sight.

"Dear me, yes," said Lily. "You can't hurt
cuttings, I think."

"Then I suppose *all* yours are growing, Clover?"
said Mr. May, turning to the other flower-stand.
"If cuttings are so hard to hurt, certainly all yours
must be safe."

"No, papa," Clover said with a smile, though she
coloured a little too. "At least—yes, they are
safe, but I do not think they are growing."

"That is all to come?"

"No, papa, I think not; at least Sam thinks
not."

"Clover's a great deal too careful, you see, papa,"
said Lily. "I've told her so often enough. She
never does anything to her cuttings but just look
at them. Now I pull mine up and down all the
time."

Mr. May laughed, watching the three faces.

"Why do not yours grow, Clover?" he said.

"Papa, I suppose there must be a reason."

"Safe philosophical ground!" said Mr. May. "The quicksand comes by insisting to know the reason. Your other plants seem to thrive under the let alone treatment, Clover?"

"O papa!" cried Primrose, "she does not let them alone at all! She waters them, and turns them round, and picks off every dead leaf, and the least bit of grass or weeds."

"So I perceive," said Mr. May, glancing from Clover's stand to Lily's, where two or three flourishing specimens of chickweed and pigweed grew at ease among the rest. "Clover works at her plants and leaves her cuttings in peace; Lily pulls up her cuttings, and—what shall I say about this young mallows, Lily, which has struck up such a friendship with your rose geranium?"

"You can say it is out, papa, if anybody asks you," said Lily, seizing the mallows with a determined hand. She gave a furious tug, and—

"Down came lullaby, baby, and all!"

The mallows held fast, and so did Lily; and then up it came, bringing with it not only its friend the geranium, but also the whole ball of earth, and at first the pot too. This quickly slipped off, falling to the floor with a crash; and

there the treacherous ball of earth, after pretending to be firm, crumbled into a hundred bits that spread far and wide over the carpet, carrying with them the young rose geranium, and leaving Lily the mallows root by way of trophy and consolation. Mr. May looked slightly disgusted. Anything like a muss was his especial abhorrence.

"On the whole," he said, as he walked away, "I think I prefer Clover's system of cultivation. There are one or two personal weeds, Lily, which I wish you would pull up before they get as deep root as that mallows."

Lily stooped down and began to repot her geranium, feeling vexed.

"I don't know why papa always contrives to be by when anything happens to me," she said. "I'm sure I never did such a thing before—never! I wonder he didn't talk about your old dish of flowers, Prim, which are dropping all over everything. Malvina has to dust that table about twenty times a day."

"Well, I don't see how it could be *twenty* times," said Prim, "because she hasn't begun yet, but I 'spose I'll have to throw 'em away. And I can't bear to."

"Why don't you pick out all the nice pieces?" said Clover. "Then you could throw the rest away."

So the dish of flowers was set upon a large newspaper, and Prim began her work. But she did not go far. The blossoms fell to pieces as she touched them, the ends of the stems were slimy,—Prim gave it up as a bad job.

"Just look," she said, holding up her fingers to which the slimy leaves stuck fast. "I can't, Clover; it makes me sick. Throw 'em all away. I wish I hadn't touched 'em."

"But here are such nice bits," said Clover. "They would grow, I think."

"Too slimy," said Prim with a little shiver. "I can't bear 'em. You can plant 'em, if you choose."

And after that Clover had a most delightful morning over the "slimy" flowers. A good many of course were fit only to throw away; and indeed the stem end of most of them was discoloured and spoiled. But above this there was often a little fresh bit,—a morsel of stem with two or three leaves, an inch, or two inches, that had not shared in the general ruin. Clover got her scissors and then carefully cut off these fresh bits, cut them off quite above the slimy part—carnation, rose, geranium—whatever it happened to be, until she had quite a little pile of neat-looking cuttings. She had been so wrapped up in her interest and pleasure, that not till the work was done, did she know that Sam stood close behind her.

"Well, my dear little patient sister," he said, "and so you have come in for residuary legatee?"

"Will these grow, do you think, dear?" Clover said with a smile.

"I think they will," said Sam, sitting down to examine the cuttings. "Not all in sand, perhaps."

"How then?" asked Clover, watching while he divided the cuttings into different sets.

"These will grow in the sand," said Sam. "All these bits of geranium and fuchsia and carnation, with the tradescantia and German ivy. But these hard-wooded things—roses, oleander and English ivy—will do better at this season another way. And this bit of cactus you must not plant at all just now. Lay it by for a month, till it dries a little, and then set it in a pot of sandy soil, with hardly any water till it begins to grow."

"And for the rest?" said Clover. She had brought her saucer of sand, and was sticking in the cuttings that were to go there.

"For the rest," said Sam, "run up to my room and bring down a wide-mouthed phial that you will find on the window seat."

Clover went and came, bringing the phial, and then Sam filled it with clean water, and tied a cord round the neck, and hung the phial up in the sunniest place he could find at Clover's window.

"Put the ends of your other cuttings in that," he

said, "and keep the water up to the neck of the phial. Then, when the roots appear, pot off the cuttings."

"Why, anybody could strike cuttings so," said Clover, looking up with a happy face.

"Anybody could," said Sam, smiling. "Do you therefore think that Nobody ought to try?" And Sam went out of the room whistling—

"I cares for Nobody,
Nobody cares for me."

Clover stayed by her window laughing. Certainly, she thought, Sam *must* know. Prim looked a little amazed when she saw all that Clover had made out of the despised dish of slimy flowers, and began to realise that a gardener must not be *too* fastidious, or he may lose a great deal.

And now the winter went softly on, and one after another the bulbs sent up their pretty flowers, delighting the whole house. To be sure, nobody downstairs had anything quite so distinguished as Sam brought forth from his room—now an anemone in wonderful array, and then a pot of ranunculus, brilliant in colour, perfect in form, and sweet as spring violets; while the true blue of his scillas quite put all the "blue" crocuses out of countenance. But the crocuses were very lovely—little innocent faced things, with markings and pencillings that were wonderful, too. Then how dainty and lady-

like were the yellow jonquils! And as for Clover's 'Incomparable' narcissus, it brought such a breath of spring with it that Mr. May declared it made him feel young again—a speech which all the children took to heart mightily. As if their father was—or ever could be—anything but young!

The Van Thol tulips were almost gone by this time, but still the hyacinths held on their sweet way, one after the other, and each, it almost seemed, more lovely than the last. Then when any spike of flowers faded, it was at once cut off, because to form and ripen seed would only weaken the bulb, without being of any use to the children; for bulb seedlings need more skill and care than they could give yet. Those pots that were out of bloom were set away from the front rank at once, giving place to others, and were put in partial retirement, with less abundant supply of water, but still watched and tended that they might perfect their leaves, to prepare the bulb for next year's flowering.

CHAPTER XX.

It occurred to Jack about this time that he also might try experiments. The flower-stands were pretty full, just now, of beauties ; for Lily's Christmas bulbs were blooming out finely,—a lovely La Perouse hyacinth, a scarlet Van Thol tulip, and a little knot of jonquils, all at once ; while Prim was rejoicing in a bright Cloth of Gold crocus, and Clover's Polyanthus Narcissus Grand Soliel d'Or was truly what Mr. Vick called it, "splendid."

There were other things too. Prim could show a pretty rosebud, fast growing to perfection, and Clover a bunch of white blossoms on her bouvardia ; while Lily's rose geranium was rampant. Over all hung the new baskets, now boasting several green leaves apiece ; for Clover's last cuttings had been very successful, and one little German ivy was already transferred to the basket, and beginning to mount the cord, and Primrose and Lily had each a somewhat promiscuous collection looking down on the heads of the passers-by. For it takes some

learning, or some experience, to know just what plants are fit for a hanging-basket and what do better in the more humble stands below. However, the young plants looked pretty, whether they were the right thing or not; and as the children had grown them themselves, they were things of unbounded interest.

It was just this crisis of affairs which Jack chose for his experiment.

"Poor things!" he had heard Clover say, "how they would like some fresh air!" for the weather had been cold, and all windows had been shut, except on those grand sweeping occasions, when the plants made an excursion to the next room.

Well, the weather was very bright this day, with clear sunshine and a rather gay wind; and also a particularly fine fire in the sitting-room. Jack came down there from his morning lessons, and found everybody gone for a drive and the plants alone in the sunshine. Jack took up a position on the rug with his back to the fire and surveyed the prospect generally.

"Those girls'll turn out gardeners yet, sure as nuts!" he said contemplatively. "Good for 'em by and by, when they come to earn their living; easy work, and don't take much brains." And Jack gave himself a tremendous stretch, thinking of his Euclid.

"Yes, they'll make a respectable thing of it," he went on, gazing at the assembled blue and yellow and white. "Pity they hadn't a little *more* sense, though. What a muss Lily made of her roots! Now if *I* took hold"—and Jack walked to the window and looked about him critically. Everything wore a smile there; it was hard to find fault.

"Very fair—very fair, indeed," said Jack, with a competent air. "Quite creditable, considering the general youth and inexperience and foolishness. They really want nothing that I can see but a little air. This white thing, now, might get some colour in its face. Shutting up plants in such weather as this. Why, it's simply ridiculous!" Jack consulted his watch.

"Just the time, too—'give air in the middle of the day.' That's the dictum. Here goes"—and Jack briskly threw up one of the windows, and then stepped back to watch the result. He preferred to take *his* fresh air just then from the hearth-rug, for the air that came in was undeniably fresh. The damp wind of the last two or three soft days had given place to a clear, sharp north-wester, and Jack felt that his constitution required him to breathe it from a distance, until at least he had his overcoat on; so he warmed his hands at the fire, and whistled and danced on the hearth-rug, until a distant sound of sleigh-bells came jingling over the snow. Then

he sprang to the window and shut it down and scampered away upstairs to his Euclid.

Euclid was particularly engrossing that morning, and in the depths of his perplexed interest Jack forgot everything else. Plants, gardeners, fresh air, experiments, all were pushed clear out of his head, and the world might have been flowerless, for aught Jack knew, when he came down—a tired boy—to tea.

“Come, children,” Mr. May was saying, as Jack entered the room; “come at once.” And then Jack, perceiving that they were all gathered round the flower-stands, began to bethink him of his experiment, and waited—chuckling to himself—to hear their joyful exclamations over the improved state of the plants. Somehow, that was not just the sound of things. The children came at once, as their father said, but Prim looked grave and anxious, and Clover lingered a little behind Lily. Lily was talking fast and excitedly.

“It is so *extraordinary*, papa!” she said.

“Not at all, my dear; plants often get frosted in the winter.”

“But, papa, they *couldn't* get frosted,” said Lily.

“Then, of course, there is no more to be said.”

“I mean, papa, the room's so warm—just like a toast.”

"Do you suppose it was 'just like a toast' all night?"

"Papa," said Primrose, "they looked *lovely* this morning when we went out. How could it have been last night, papa?"

"The effect was not visible, I suppose, at first," said Mr. May, who knew less about gardening than about some other things.

"No use talking to these girls about effects, sir," said Jack, who, in spite of his "brains" had not yet found out just the matter in hand. "If the things don't grow, it's somebody's evil eye; and if they do, it's quite supernatural; that's as much as *they* know."

"Is it?" said Lily. "Then I should just like to know whose evil eye—as you call it—has killed all Clover's plants."

"Killed 'em? Stuff!" said Jack, "they've grown out of her knowledge, that's all."

Clover could not help laughing a little, though it made the tears start up in her eyes again.

"That's a pleasant view to take," she said, "I shall remember that the next time you get your face cut up with a snowball, Jack—you've only 'grown out of my remembrance.'"

"Stuff!" Jack repeated under his breath, managing so that the girls should hear, but not his father.

"Papa," said little Primrose, "do you think Jack need always say 'stuff!' whenever we say anything?"

"No, my dear, I think it is quite unnecessary," said Mr. May, "especially as Jack is trying to qualify himself to be a man some day."

"But, papa," said Lily, "isn't it strange how things always happen to Clover's plants?"

"I think I have heard that some things happen to Lily's occasionally," said her father.

"Yes, papa, but I didn't mean that," said Lily hastily; "but last summer you know there were some empty places in her garden, while mine was quite full; and this winter her cuttings wouldn't grow—her first cuttings—and now her plants are all frozen up."

Jack started a little, invisibly, down in his shoes. He hurriedly took another muffin and began to deal with it in the most summary manner.

"Jack," said his mother, "what can you be thinking of? Even in that unknown part of the world where people take two muffins at once, it is not usual, I believe, to butter them upon both sides twice over!"

For once in his life Jack blushed, head and ears and all, and there was a general laugh.

"Poor boy," said Mr. May, "he is afraid of a famine!"

"No, sir," said Jack, "but I was thinking of something else."

"So I suppose."

"Well, papa, if he was thinking of my plants, I don't much wonder he forgot everything else," said Clover, who always came to the rescue.

"They look just as if they'd been burned, papa," said Lily—"as if somebody had lighted a newspaper, you know, and drawn it across them in front."

"Frost would do that," said Sam. "Some one must have opened the window upon them."

"Even then I should have thought the warm air of the room would have kept them safe," said Mrs. May.

"The warm air of the room has made them tender, mamma, and the outer air is very sharp."

Tea ended with no more words from Jack. Neither did he go near the window on his way out. But next morning early, when he heard the children's voices still upstairs, Jack made a rush down and surveyed the results of *his* experiment. Lily's and Prim's plants were all safe, but Clover's, by which he had opened the window, looked indeed exactly as if a hot breath of fire had swept across them—wilted and drooping and scorched. Jack stood still in absolute consternation.

"If it had been any one of 'em but Clover, I wouldn't have cared so much," he said to himself;

"but I plagued her last summer, and I've ruined her now. It's too bad!"

Then Clover came softly into the room and stood by him.

"It *is* rather bad, isn't it?" she said sadly; "they were looking so pretty!"

"It's abominable!" Jack burst forth.

"Oh, but she didn't know any better!" said Clover.

"She? Who are you talking about?" said Jack with a groan.

"Why, Malvina," said Clover. "I suppose it must have been Malvina, but mamma said I'd better not ask her, because she might be tempted to deny it."

"Very much tempted, I should think," said Jack.

"And so mamma said she would just tell her herself never to do it again."

"Look here!" said Jack; "look at me, Clo'—I am Malvina. What do you think of that?"

"Think of that?" said Clover astonished. "Why, Jack, you don't mean—you can't mean"——

"I can mean just that, and I do!" said Jack fiercely, for he had to be fierce with somebody. "Now what do you say?"

Clover did not say anything. She stood back and looked at him.

"But—you didn't mean to?" she said at last.

"Mean to?" echoed Jack. "Do you suppose I'm the sort of boy to open a window without meaning to?"

Clover looked at him in absolute consternation. *Mean to!* Was that possible?

"But you never meant to kill my plants?" she said, taking breath again.

"Ah, there you've hit it!" said Jack. "I don't believe I could have been such a ninny, only there was such a fuss about Lily's silly experiments, and I thought I'd just try a real good one, and show her how. And I don't see now how it didn't succeed!" said Jack in a puzzled voice, "the room was so warm. You see, Clo', I meant to give 'em a real start."

"Well, I suppose you did that," said Clover, with half a smile and half a sigh. "At least you gave me one. But never mind, Jack—only don't let us try any more experiments this winter."

"You may go bail for me to that extent," said Jack with some energy. "O Clo'! do you think I've killed 'em all?"

"No, I hope not," said Clover, bending over her plants and softly touching the blasted shoots. "Sam said a good many of the leaves would fall off, but then you know if the plants are alive, they'll put out more."

"And if they ain't, they won't," said Jack con-

cisely. "Tell you what, *my* leaves have come off like October!"

He stood watching the seared plants, and the patient little face that bent over them, until he saw Clover's eyelashes begin to glisten; and then (as he afterwards declared) he was very near turning fool at once.

"See here, Clo'," he said, "don't! I'll save every scrap of my money, and buy you a whole furious lot of new things."

Clover's laugh at this shook down the tears a little, like an April-breeze.

"Hush," she said, "you shan't do any such thing. Why, one can't have flowers and not have misfortunes too, I suppose."

"I needn't bring 'em, I 'spose," said Jack penitently.

"No, you needn't another time," said Clover. "But now, dear, we won't talk any more about it. And we won't tell anybody," she added, patting his shoulders (for Clover could be quite patronising upon occasion).

"Do you mean to say you *don't* mean to tell?" quoth Jack, staring at her.

"Why, of course not; what should I tell for?" said Clover. "That'll be our secret—yours and mine."

Jack looked at her again, and went off without

another word. Apparently, however, the thing was too much for him, for later in the day he came to Mrs. May for a solution of his difficulties. The children were out walking, and Mrs. May sat alone in the early twilight, when Jack came in, and throwing himself down on the hearth-rug gazed at the fire.

"Mamma, I'm a tired boy!"

"Likewise sleepy?"

"No, ma'am. Mamma," said Jack, raising himself on his elbows, "does being a church member make old Clo' so different from all the other girls?"

"Being a church member makes people different only when it is a sign that they *are* different," said Mrs. May.

"Hum,"— said Jack; "that is, it means something *when* it means something, I suppose. Yes'm. Mamma, I think it means a good deal with Clo'."

"So do I," said her mother tenderly. And the subject dropped. Jack sighed and laid himself down on the hearth and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was rather a comfort just now to have Mr. Vick's new catalogue come in ; the minds of the children were happily diverted from frozen plants and possible ill-doers. At another time, Jack would doubtless have expressed his wonder that Mr Vick should send a catalogue to a house from which he had received such a crazy letter ; but at present Jack was sore on the subject of experiments, and let Lily alone. I don't know but it was almost more pleasure to study the catalogue this year than it had been the last ; there was a mingling now of old friends with the new acquaintances that seemed so desirable. And by degrees when the seed names had been studied up and down and back and forth, the children made the delightful discovery that there were bulbs also in this catalogue.

"Only see!" said Lily, who first found it out ; "right in here between the vines and the cabbages, 'Summer flowering bulbs.' Isn't that too splendid!"

Immediately the three heads came together in close consultation over the open page.

"The gladiolus is the most beautiful of our
N

summer bulbs," said Lily, reading on. "Oh, I don't know but I'll put all my money in gladioluses. What do you say, girls?"

"But, Lily," said Primrose, "we haven't got any money yet."

"Papa's sure to give us some," said Lily confidently. "I'll ask him to-night."

"Oh no, don't ask him," said Clover. "Maybe he don't think it's best."

"Well, I'll put the catalogue in his way, then, so he can't help seeing it," said Lily. "Now let's go on and make up our list."

"But we don't know how much money we'll have," said little Primrose.

"Dear me!" said Lily, "can't you guess at it? Call it five dollars."

"Oh, five dollars!" said Primrose. "I'm sure we shan't have that."

"Well, call it what you like," said Lily impatiently. "I'm going to make up my list. The first thing is to know what you want. It'll be time enough then to see if you can get it."

"That's you all over," said Jack. "Ruin yourself in imagination, and then have to be cut down all to snips in practice."

"Be quiet," said Lily. "It won't ruin me, I suppose, to get some gladioluses. Just listen, Clover: 'light cherry, marbled with white,' 'rose,

streaked with carmine and purple.' And here's 'vermilion scarlet' and 'light yellow' and 'fiery red.' Why, they're absolutely magnificent. I don't think I'll get another thing but gladioluses."

"But, Lily," said Clover, "you can't fill your garden with them, because they're too dear. See—thirty cents, and fifty cents, and a dollar, and twelve shillings. And here's one for two dollars and twenty-five cents!"

"Oh! oh!" said Primrose, quite dismayed.

"Well, I needn't get those tremendous ones," said Lily, "any more than I need with the seeds. Here are some for twenty-five cents, and twenty, and fifteen."

"But there are only five times twenty in a dollar," said Primrose.

"I guess I know that," said Lily. "Let's go on and see what comes next. Lilies! why I ought to fill my garden with *them*, and then everybody'd know it was mine."

"At that rate I ought to plant nothing but clover," said her sister, laughing.

"Then you could be mowed off and save trouble," said Primrose.

"Primrose May, you're ridiculous," said Lily. "See here, suppose we get part bulbs and part seeds?"

"I always want so many seeds!" said Prim with a sigh.

"So do I," said Clover. "And the thing is, thirty cents will go so much farther in seeds. You see, Lily, one gladiolus wouldn't fill up much."

"It would fill one's eye, as papa says," said Lily. "I'm going in for gladioluses. If papa gives me a dollar, I shall get two gladioluses, and forty cents worth of seeds."

"Oh, do you think papa will give us a dollar—a dollar apiece, I mean?" said Prim.

"I shouldn't wonder if he didn't give us anything," said Clover. "You know we had a dollar last spring, and all our tools; and then this fall our bulbs, and then more things at Christmas. I don't think we ought to have anything more."

"Oh, I do," said Lily; "all we can get. I dare say he's just forgotten it. I mean to ask him."

"Oh no, I wouldn't," said Clover.

"I don't mean ask him for money," said Lily, "but just if he's forgotten. Because if he *means* to give us anything, it's time we had it."

Jack, sitting in his corner, looked on and listened.

"That's the only drawback to getting things," he thought to himself, feeling in his pockets—"the money. If one could go down to the shore, now, and pick up a lot of cowries! And I'm bound to have some of those things for old Clo', just to pay her for the window. I say, girls!"

"Well?" said Lily.

"Don't you go to begging papa for money. I want every cent he can spare, myself."

"You're a great boy of business," said Lily. "We never do beg papa for money, sir. He gives it to us of his own accord."

"Oh, does he, though?" said Jack scornfully.

"Yes, because we're prudent and discreet," said Lily. "You'll see. Just you wait a while, Mr. Jack."

Jack deigned no answer, but a derisive little laugh, and the girls went back to their catalogue.

"We'll make our lists, at all events," said Clover. "That won't do any harm, and it's such pleasure."

"Let's make 'em as if we had twenty dollars," said Lily. But at this flight of fancy even Prim shook her head.

"It's too hard work cutting them down again," said Clover. "But I do think I should like to take thirty cents and get one bulb—if papa gives us a dollar. I'll set so much aside, I guess. That'll leave seventy for seeds. And I've got some mignonette and other things to begin with."

"I've got lots of petunia seeds," said Lily. "Well, let's each get a bulb—and let's have 'em all different. Here's ever so many kinds. I'll get a gladiolus. No—a dahlia; don't you remember the Jarvis dahlias? Splendid!"

"Which one will you get?" said Prim. "Get this—'rich crimson.'"

"Such an ugly name," said Lily—" 'British Triumph.' No, indeed; I'll have this—'Vice-President.'"

"But you don't know which Vice-President it was," said Prim.

"No, but it's 'orange buff—good and constant'—don't you see?" said Lily.

"Well, I don't know what constant means, when it's a dahlia," said Prim. "I think I'll have a gladiolus. This one—'Flora.' See, it's 'a perfect shape' Mr. Vick says. And it's white. I like white."

"But, dear, that one costs a dollar," said Clover.

"A whole dollar?" cried Prim. "Oh, that will never do. Well, here's Cleopatra—'soft lilac,' and 'very fine.' And 'new.'"

"But *that* costs two dollars," said Lily.

"I never saw anything like these gladiolus bulbs," said Prim. "They're not made of gold, I s'pose."

"Why don't you look down the list of prices first," said Clover, "and then you won't make such mistakes?"

"I'll do that," said Prim, "and stop at the first thirty cents I come too. Why, this first of all is only twenty! but then I want mine to cost as much as Lily's dahlia. Oh, here's the first thirty—'A-A-glæ.' That won't do, the name's too hard."

"There's another close by," said Lily; "'Berenice—rose, streaked with purple.'"

"I don't like streaky things," said Primrose, jumping down the long list. "Here—this will do; 'Mars—beautiful scarlet.' To be sure, it only costs twenty-five cents, but that's *almost* as much."

"I never saw such a child as you are," said Lily. "Why, you'll have five cents more for seeds—that's all. What will you get, Clover?"

Clover had been studying the matter sedately.

"I'm in a puzzle," she said. "First I thought I would have two tuberose, and then I thought I would get three of these tiger flowers and make a group. You see *Tigridia pavonia* is only ten cents."

"Oh, get the tuberose too!" said Primrose, "and put them in the very middle of your garden, and the three tiger flowers round 'em."

"I'm afraid that would cost too much," said Clover, "but I'll see first how many seeds I must have."

They went into a close and earnest consultation again, while Jack returned once more to his Virgil. But when a while afterwards the Jarvis carriage was announced, and the children all rushed off to greet Miss Maria, then Jack came out of his corner and picked up the forsaken catalogue. It is to be feared that summer flowering bulbs had figured more largely on Jack's pages that morning than they are apt to do in most Latin authors. Certainly his ideas seemed

much fuller of them than of "pious Æneas" and his doings. Jack went at the catalogue as if his mind had studied *that* matter thoroughly.

"Only way to do," he said to himself, but talking aloud, as Jack was very fond of doing when no one else was by. "You see I haven't the spare cash at present, nor any cash at all, in fact, and all the outstanding promissory notes ain't so large as could be wished. I'll just make out a first-class list, and tell Mr. Vick to lay 'em by till I send for 'em. For of course he wouldn't like to send on trust, as he don't know me. Not yet," Jack added, as if there was every prospect that Mr. Vick *would* know him pretty thoroughly by and by.

Jack fished out the stump of a pencil from the articles, all and sundry, in his pocket, and carefully tearing out the order sheet with which the catalogue was supplied, he went to work.

"Now, *this* is to be an order," said Jack; "names and colours; no looking at prices for me, sir;" and down at the head of his list went "Belle Gabrielle, lilac, rose and carmine." That all these advantages would cost him a dollar, that fact Jack sagely ignored for the present. And (given a good catalogue) there is nothing easier than to make up a magnificent list on Jack's plan.

"Brenchleyensis" was the next name that caught his favour. "'Vermilion scarlet,'" he said, "and a

good exercise for 'em in spelling and pronunciation. They may as well get all they can out of their gardens." This brilliant old beauty had the farther advantage of costing but twenty cents, but that again Jack did not notice.

"'Calendulaceus,' that's another tough one," quoth Jack, looking sharply at the catalogue to see how to spell it himself. "Good colour, too—'bright nankeen, streaked.' Then 'Chateaubriand, cherry rose and very fine,' and '*Couranti fulgens*'—won't they want to know what that means, just? And 'Eldorado,' yellow, and 'Endymion,' rose." Jack lay back in his chair, and considered.

"Whew!" he said; "this making lists is warm work, when you haven't got the money and don't know where it's to come from. There's seven down; and 'Juno,' I'm bound to have her, and 'Cleopatra.' Oh, here are more on this page!—'Nestor' and 'Phidias' " (Phidias was a four dollar novelty, but Jack gave no heed), "and 'Sappho, long spike,' and 'Zenobia, fine spike,' and 'Talisman, long spike, large flowers, violet, with a large margin of carmine cherry, ground white, divisions lined with pure white.' 'Cock-a-doodle-do!' if anybody knows what all that means—I don't;" and Jack threw himself head first down upon the rug, and with a marvellous resolution came right side up again. Then he looked at his list.

"I think that will do pretty well," he said, "for a girl who's got nothing, as they say when people get married. Now how's this letter to be written? 'Dear sir. I haven't got the money—please wait till I get it.' *That* won't do.

"'Dear sir—Please make up the package at your earliest convenience, and I will send for it at mine.'

"No—tells too much.

"'Dear sir—Knowing your immense business, I must ask you to reserve for me the enclosed bulbs, and I will reserve for you the money—which isn't enclosed!'" said Jack with a laugh. "'Which I will enclose as soon as my arrangements are completed.'

"How the mischief *do* people say such things, I wonder? Promising to pay money which you haven't got, and don't know how to get!" Jack shook his head, threw down the catalogue, and went back to Virgil, as, on the whole, the easier puzzle of the two.

CHAPTER XXII.

"LILY," said Mrs. May one morning, as she looked over the stocking basket, "I think your drawers have not been put in order this week."

"No, mamma,"—Lily was just putting finishing touches to the arrangement of her flower-stand—"I meant to have done it yesterday, and then I got to studying the catalogue and forgot."

Clover looked up from her book, and Prim from her bit of patchwork, and then everybody went on in silence as before.

"I find a stocking here," said Mrs. May, speaking again after a while, "which has had a large hole in the heel. Somebody has worn it too long without mending. And then, to make matters worse by way of mending them, somebody has caught up the hole—somehow, anyhow—with rather coarse spool cotton, and (I suppose) worn the stocking again. Does any one here plead guilty to such unladylike carelessness?"

"Mamma," said Lily, blushing a little, "I don't know that there's any *guilty* about it. Of course

it's my stocking. But I did mean to mend the hole last Saturday,—and then, you know, I had to water my bulbs—and then it grew dark. And in the evening I didn't want to darn. So I thought I'd just sew it up for once."

"What a waste of words!" said Mrs. May in answer to Lily's long speech. "My dear, those four would have told the whole—'I didn't want to.'"

"No, but, mamma," said Lily, "I did want to, in a way—I did mean to, I'm sure."

"Do you know," said her mother, "that when Pleasure leaves her proper place behind Duty, and insists upon walking in front, she soon loses her bright garments, and is Pleasure no longer? Some day you will find this out."

"What is she then, mamma?" asked Primrose, laying down the scrap of pink calico.

"Generally, she borrows a dress from Disappointment, or lets that gloomy sister of hers take her place."

"Well, I shouldn't think Pleasure and Disappointment could *ever* be sisters!" said Prim.

"But, mamma, do you think Pleasure always walks behind Duty?" said Lily.

"On the contrary, as I said, she sometimes goes on ahead."

"But I mean," said Lily, "when she isn't there,

you know. I think Duty walks all by herself, most times."

"What Duty? Darning stockings, for instance?"

"Well, yes, mamma—darning stockings, for instance," said Lily; "there's not a speck of pleasure about *that*."

"O Lily!" said Clover, "I'm sure there's the pleasure of having them done. I think rolling up stockings—stockings that you have darned yourself—is quite lovely."

"But that's not pleasure in the duty," said Lily, "it's the pleasure of getting rid of it. Oh yes, I like *that*, it's splendid."

"That is Pleasure walking after Duty," said Mrs. May.

"Mamma," said Primrose, "I should like to have pleasure walk *with* my patchwork;" and Prim gazed at her last stitches with something very like disgust.

"That sounds reasonable," said her mother, smiling.

"Yes, and I'm tired watching these bulbs!" said Lily.

"Pleasure before duty," said Mrs. May.

"No, but," said Lily, "this hyacinth, mamma, will *not* grow up; and if I darned stockings for ever, that wouldn't hurry it."

"I guess you'd find it had grown up when you got through," said Prim.

"That hyacinth probably means to distinguish itself," said Mrs. May.

"I don't see why being slow distinguishes things," said Lily.

"Did you ever hear the story of 'The Little China Asters'?" inquired her mother.

"O mamma! a story, a story!" cried Primrose. "That's the *very* thing!"

"Yes, and I love China Asters so much," said Clover, coming near, work in hand.

"Is it a story about me?" said Lily, who was sometimes suspicious of stories.

"You're not a China Aster, are you?" said Prim. "Now be quiet. Well, mamma?"

"Well, half a dozen China Aster seeds were sowed in a garden. The soil was good, the sun shone warm and bright upon the bed, the rain dropped down softly to water it; and so it came to pass that each one of the six seeds sprouted and grew and became a plant."

"They must have been Mr. Vick's seeds," remarked Primrose.

"How they did grow! At least four of them—pushing out broad green leaves, and sending up a strong, stout stem, until they began to look like little trees. But all this time there was not the least sign of a flower; and from all that appeared, China Asters had nothing to do but grow, and never thought of such

a thing as being admired. The other two plants looked on in disgust. 'One would really think,' said the first, 'that our sisters had forgotten why they were planted! Of course we were placed here to make a show, and to beautify the garden—but instead of flowers I can see nothing but a forest of green leaves.'"

"I don't even see that on my hyacinth," said Lily. "Go on, please, mamma—this begins to grow interesting."

"Oh, begin!" said Primrose.

"'But we are too young yet, my sister,' said one of the tall ones, growing away. 'We shall have all the finer flowers by and by, but no one can expect us to make a display until we are grown up.'"

"That's one comfort," said Prim. "Let's tell Maria Jarvis. Well, mamma?"

"'Very fine!' said the other, 'but why should we wait for that? Just think how delightful it would be to blossom out at once! I can't see, for my part, why the grown-up flowers should keep all the gay colours to themselves. And this green dress is so stupid.'"

"Oh, what a sensible China Aster!" cried Lily. "Mamma, I've felt just so a thousand times. I'd like to be grown up at once and done with the trouble."

"They say this is the proper dress for young

flowers, however,' said another tall sister. 'They say young plants should grow silently and modestly until they have reached the flowering size and age.'

"Two eyes and two ears and one tongue," said Lily, quoting. "Dear me, I didn't know flowers ever had that said to *them*!"

"Just remember the tuft of green lily leaves awhile ago,' said the tall Aster, 'and now see the flower stems,—why they are four feet high!'

"Do as you please,' said the little one; 'wear green all your life for what I care; but my brother and I here know what is due to ourselves, and we intend to be full-blown flowers immediately—not great tall weeds.'

"So, instead of sending down their roots deep into the earth, to gain strength and nourishment—instead of spreading out leaf and stalk, and growing into full health and vigour, with the sunshine and rain, the two little plants set to work to dress themselves up like their elders. With great effort they pushed out three or four small buds, and then, without even giving the buds much time to grow, they burst forth into full-blown China Asters. Far up above them their strong, hearty sisters were beginning to throw out large, leafy buds, which would not open yet for some time: they were all green still; but the mere bud was almost as large as the full bloom

for the other two. There they stood—little weak things, decked one in pink and one in blue, and everybody said, 'What a pity! How fine they would have been if they had not flowered quite so soon!'"

"Little geese," said Lily impatiently.

"It was very gratifying, of course," Mrs. May went on, "to look like real grown-up flowers—here was really a pink blossom, and there was a blue; but the blossoms had no rich clustering leaves to shade them and set off their beauty; and the weak roots went so little way into the ground, that when dry weather came both little asters shrivelled all up, and looked like little old women."

"Ugh!" said Primrose. "One of my asters did just so."

"What became of the rest, mamma?" said Clover.

"They bloomed and flourished in their gay beauty until frost. Blossom after blossom unwrapped its coloured petals, broad and clear tinted and well set. They ripened seed; they were a joy to everybody; only the frost could have failed to love them."

"Frost is so cold-hearted," said Clover.

"I do love China Asters!" said Primrose. "I mean to have ever so many next summer. And, oh! how I do wish spring would come!"

"Take care," said Lily. "I guess there's more than one way of being in too much of a hurry."

Mamma, what do you call the moral of your story?"

"The moral that perhaps you had best notice first," said Mrs. May, "is that while you have sat on the floor with your hands folded, to listen, Clover has run the whole heel of a stocking."

CHAPTER XXIII.

ONE bright afternoon in February, the Jarvis' sleigh came jingling up to Mr. May's door. This was not the little cutter in which Miss Maria usually paid her visits, but the great sleigh, with more robes and bells and trappings generally, than one would easily reckon up. Therein sat Miss Maria alone in state.

"They are all to come," she said to the girl who opened the door—"all the three. I want to talk to them on important business. And bid them hurry." With which Miss Maria leaned back in her robes, and gazed at the white snow with a very absorbed business air indeed.

It happened to be (as Lily called it) one of those *good* days, when nothing is in the way of anything. Dinner was over, lessons were done, bulbs were watered. Nay, more; the children were already half clad in walking dress—and so, "making haste" after the most approved fashion, they were actually ready and in the sleigh before Miss Maria's patience was more than a quarter spent.

"You've been quite quick," she said graciously,

as the three glad children tucked themselves in. "Now, Johnson, drive till I tell you to turn." And pulling up her gloves, and giving her plume the least possible wave in the air, Miss Maria settled herself comfortably back again "in state."

"I have a great deal of business to talk over," she said; "and as it is quite private, I thought we had better be out doors. You always have so many brothers around."

"We haven't got so many as you have," said Prim.

"But mine are away at school—or at college," said Miss Maria. "You see, girls, my mother is going to have a fair."

"A fair!" said Primrose. "How charming!" said Lily. While Clover looked interested, and inquired what for.

"Well," said Miss Maria with great stateliness, "there are some poor people down near our house who've had a fire."

"Well, *that's* good," said Primrose, "in cold weather."

"You're such a little goose!" said Maria; "I mean they were burnt up, child."

"Oh! Burnt up!" said Primrose.

"Not the people, child, but their house," said Maria tartly. "And of course they lost everything. People who haven't anything to lose always do, my father says."

"I suppose it's very easy in that case," said Clover.

"Yes," said Maria. "So now of course they've got nothing to put on—not even rags—and my mother says such a state of things must not continue."

Miss Maria pulled up her fur-topped kid glove again, and glanced at the strong worsted gloves which covered the other six little hands in the sleigh, somewhat as sleek Mrs. Tabby might look at rough Mr. Skye.

"Must not continue—," Lily repeated, giving her friend a reminder of the topic in hand.

"No—they must be supplied at once," said Miss Maria.

"Well, *I* wouldn't supply 'em with any more rags," said Primrose. "I think it's good they were burnt up; I hate rags."

"That child ought to have stayed at home," said Miss Maria severely, "unless she has sense enough to keep quiet."

Clover put her arm softly round Prim, and answered for it that they would *both* keep quiet, as long as the young lady wished.

"But first," said Maria, "look at my cuirass. You can only see the front, but it's lovely behind—'perfect,' my mother says. It's cut just like my mother's."

"Then you're a little China Aster," said Prim, forgetting the compact of silence.

"Hush, dear!" Clover said, smothering a laugh.

Miss Maria looked in mute astonishment.

"A *what*?" she said. "I never saw such a little impertinence in all my life."

"But you were telling us about the fair," said Clover, for Lily was quite unable to speak. Even her admiration of Maria's dress could not hide the aptness of Prim's suggestion. Maria recovered her complacency at once.

"So I was," she said. "Well, these folks must be supplied. And my mother thinks it is not generous to do it all herself, because so many other people would like part of the pleasure. It is a pleasure always, my mother says, to relieve the poor. So she's going to give other people a chance. And we're to have a fair at our house,—and there's to be a flower table, and a candy table, and a pincushion table."

"Nothing but pincushions?" said Prim.

"No," said Maria. "My mother says there are sure to be a great many sent in, and it will be a novel idea to group them together on one table. She'll do the same with the mats."

"What a beautiful way!" said Lily.

"Yes, I think it is fine," said Miss Maria, gratified. "Maybe mamma'll take charge of those two

tables herself. Have 'em near together, you know. Because so often when people want cushions they want mats too. It's a similarity of taste." Miss Maria leaned back in the fur robes again, and once more became thoughtful.

"Well, who'll have the candy?" said Prim, breaking out again, like the irrepressible little child she was.

"I shall keep that myself," said Miss Maria with dignity. "It is a responsible place, and you cannot trust everybody. And you're all to have the flowers."

"We? *we*?" exclaimed the children in various tones of wonder and joy.

"Yes," said Miss Maria. "One can't have a gardener there, you know."

"But what are we to do?" cried they, breathless.

"Why, stand at the table—behind it, you know—and sell the flowers. William Stubbs will arrange them. There'll be bouquets and little baskets, and little pots and seeds."

"Oh, and may we buy some too?" inquired Prim.

"Buy 'em all, if you like," said Miss Maria. "And you may bring any spare ones you've got, too, if they're nice; and of course you'll be nicely dressed."

"I s'pose mamma'll let us wear our best merinoes," said Prim.

"Something dark," said Miss Maria, "to set off the flowers, you know. My mother says black silk would be best, or invisible blue."

"Invisible blue!" Primrose repeated. But Clover gave her a warning touch and she was silent.

"And we're all three to be at the flower table?" said Lily, who had been silently revolving all sorts of brilliant plans.

"Yes; my mother said it would look interesting."

Clover choked and coughed, and looked away over the snow, but Lily was too full of her own thoughts even to smile.

"Then the things ought to be divided," she said, making a table of her lap and the fur robe. "And it must have a dark, dark red cover; and the pots must be behind and the bouquets in front, and the baskets here and there; and the seeds may go at the end."

"Very good, indeed," said Miss Maria approvingly. "My mother said you would do nicely. William Stubbs is going to dress the room."

"Will that be in black silk too?" said Prim, who, to say truth, was getting rather bewildered. But at that the other three girls laughed so heartily that she did not venture to push her question. The

four went into a depth of consultation and enjoyment, the sleigh jingled merrily on, and the sunbeams were long and low before Miss Maria called out—

“Turn, Johnson! and set the Misses May down first.”

It was close upon tea time now, and all the rest of the family were assembled in the little sitting-room when the sleigh drove up. Sam ran out to lift the children down, and they rushed up the steps and into the sitting-room in breathless haste.

“O mamma! the Jarvises are going to have a fair, and *we* are to sell the flowers!” cried Lily excitedly.

“Do you think we may, mamma? Will you let us?” said Clover softly from behind her mother’s chair.

“And we’re to wear black silk dresses,” said Prim. “And, O mamma! what *is* invisible blue?”

“You thought it was blue when you looked, and next time you find it isn’t,” said Jack, while the others laughed a little at the earnest question. “I should think you’d know what invisible means.”

“So I do,” said Primrose. “It’s something you can’t see.”

“Well, you can’t see the blue—only it’s there,” said Jack.

“What is the use of it then?” said Primrose, turning her serious eyes to him. “Mrs. Jarvis said

invisible blue would *do*. I should not think it would at all, if you can't see it."

"Very reason," said Jack. "If you could it wouldn't."

Primrose looked hopelessly at the smiling faces.

"Come here, Prim," said her father. "What is all this about selling flowers? Are the gardens to be turned into a speculation?"

"It's for Mrs. Jarvis's poor people," explained Prim, as she climbed on his lap; "and we're to sell the flowers, because we know about 'em. And we may bring any of our own; and we must wear black silk dresses—only invisible blue would *do*."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"MAMMA," said Primrose, "do grown-up people ever have such puzzling things?"

It was just the firelight time, between daylight and dark, and all the family sat together, waiting for candles and tea. Mr. May had thrown himself on the sofa; Jack, curled up in the window seat, watched for a stray dog or a chance sleigh or a late passer-by on foot; Sam sat pondering, with his head on his hand, and the three girls had grouped themselves around their mother. Clover sat a little back out of sight, leaning against Mrs. May's great chair, and Lily and Primrose were on the rug, in the full fireshine, at her feet.

"Mamma," said Primrose, when the silence had lasted a long time, "*do* grown-up people ever have such puzzling things?"

"As what?"

"Things to decide upon, mamma—puzzling things!" said Primrose, knitting her brows. "As children do, I mean."

"They have a few now and then," said Mrs. May with a smile. "Quite as puzzling."

"I thought perhaps they never did," said Prim. "Because they can always do what they like, you know."

"Indeed, I do not know it," said Mrs. May. "If that be so, I have never found it out."

"O mamma!" said Lily. "Why they wear what they like, always, I'm sure."

"People that are sure are sometimes mistaken."

"But that is just the very thing, mamma," said Primrose. "It's just what I was thinking of. What *shall* we do about the black silks?"

"For the fair, you know, mamma," said Lily eagerly. "But it's no use talking, we haven't got 'em to wear."

"Then I do not really see the puzzle," said Mrs. May. "How can it be a question whether you should wear what you have not got?"

"I suppose the question really was, whether we should get them," said Lily.

"Oh, there is no such question, even on my list of puzzles," said her mother, smiling; "so you may safely dismiss it from yours. You may wear all the black silk you have now, but no more."

"All we have now!" Lily cried. "Why, we haven't got any. Not a speck."

"Oh yes, we've got our black silk aprons, you know," said Prim contemplatively.

"Aprons, at a fair!" said Lily.

"I think aprons for little shopwomen, even at a fair, would be extremely suitable," said Mrs. May.

"Yes, if they were over invisible blue dresses," said Lily, who was gifted with an imagination.

"So they will be," said Jack, putting in his word. "The dresses will be invisible, as well as the blue."

"Stuff!" said Lily. "We've got to wear our merinoes."

"Mamma," said Primrose, "I never went to a fair. And I'd so like to have it nice!"

"What can I do to make it nice, love?"

"O mamma!" cried Lily. "Would you do anything?"

"Anything in reason."

"Ah, I know what that means," said Lily. "That means just nothing at all."

"O Lily!" said Clover, shocked.

"Nothing that I want, of course," explained Lily.

"Come here, Lily," said Mr. May from his sofa. "What is this you are saying? That you never want anything reasonable?"

"No, papa,"—Lily transferred herself to the end of the rug nearest him—"I mean what mamma thinks reasonable."

"Mamma is of course mistaken."

"Well, we don't always think just alike," said Lily frankly.

"I presume not."

"Well, papa," said Lily again, quite understanding the force of his words, "don't you think it ever *could* happen that I should be right?"

"I confess my prejudices are on the side of reason, generally," said Mr. May.

"But suppose that was my side?" said Lily.

"That would be to suppose it was not mamma's."

Lily did not venture to give any thoughts about this last supposition.

"Where is Clover?" said Mr. May after a pause. "Is she too aching for a black silk dress?"

"No, papa," said Clover with a laugh; "I am not aching for anything just now."

"Oh, but you were!" cried Primrose; "this morning, don't you know? Not for a dress, for something else."

"I think not," said Clover.

"Oh yes, you were," Prim repeated. "When Lily asked you if you didn't ache with impatience, and you said 'No,' and then you said, 'Well, just a little bit.'"

"Clover aching with impatience," said Mr. May; "that is an entirely new and striking combination; what is it about, Prim?"

There was a dead silence.

"Well?" said Mr. May.

"They said I mustn't talk about it, papa—at least Clover did," Primrose answered with hesitation.

"Papa," said Clover, "it was something we had agreed not to speak about."

"Break the bond, for me."

"Well, if you will have it, papa," said Lily, nothing loth; "it was about our gardens and our flower seeds, and the money."

"What money?"

"For the seeds, papa. You know we can't buy seeds without money."

"Painfully true," said Mr. May; "but who wants to do it?"

"I guess we'd all *like* to," said Lily, "since we haven't got the money."

"To be sure!" said Mr. May. "Now I understand. The appropriations have been forgotten, and poor Clover—Clove, my dear, I think after all you must have been aching with *patience*! Well, go on and make up your lists; the money shall be forthcoming."

"But, papa," said Lily boldly, "we can't—at least we can't *finish* them—till we know what the money is."

"The amount of the appropriation, eh? Let me see—what was it last year?"

"A dollar apiece, papa," said Primrose.

"And, of course, this year I am expected to increase it. Well, I don't mind giving you each a quarter more, if you will give me a quarter more pleasure and bloom."

There was a great delight and clapping of hands at this announcement, and for a time black silk dresses were quite out of mind ; and indeed, but for Miss Jarvis's impressive words, neither black silk nor invisible blue would have come into mind at all. Once there, however, of course they went and came again.

"Sam, dear," whispered little Primrose, climbing on his lap, "will *you* go to the fair?"

"I think not."

"Then I shall buy you something. Oh, what shall it be?"

"Anything—except a bouquet," said Sam.

"*Except* a bouquet!" cried all the girls.

"Well," said Sam, telling a story he had read somewhere, "a bunch of flowers, on their way to a party, lay for some time on a marble table while their mistress was dressing. Tired out with her long toilet, yet not so far exhausted as to close their eyes, they agreed to tell stories to amuse each other."

"Like us," said Primrose.

"'And what shall we tell?' said the Abutilon, hanging its head. Then the Rose answered—

"'Let us tell the early history and abode of our

respective families. Let each flower describe its own native place, that we may know how to pity those who have always lived in such a house as this where we are now assembled.' Then the other flowers cried out—

" 'Rose, begin !'

" The Rose blushed a little at that, but began at once. She was too modest to make a fuss about anything.

" 'My family,' said the Rose, 'has been from the earliest times so wide-spread upon the earth, that the difficulty would be to find a region that is *not* our abode; yet I have heard it said that we originally came from the East. The Persian roses have always been celebrated, and also the Chinese; but we live and flourish in every climate. Some of us run wild about the rocks (it is a very sweet wildness, too), and others show their faces only in the garden or greenhouse. Some of us climb the trees; and as for our cousin Sweetbrier, she lives there all the time if she can. Rosewater and otto of rose are our chief productions. Our work in the world,' said the Rose, with another blush, 'is to be sweet and to be loved.'

" 'You break my heart,' said the Ground Pine, 'with your woods and rocks and trees. I thought I was as miserable as I could be, before. Why need you remind me of what I used to be? In the first

place, I do not see why I am here at all—unless to keep you flower stems from withering. Nobody looks at me; nobody cares for me. I am only “green stuff,” good for nothing but to keep the violets from crowding my lady Camellia. And then to talk of my native woods! Why, there I heard pine-tree music all the night long, and by day the partridges paid me many a visit, running back and forth after berries. Poor things! They are downstairs now, I suppose, on the supper table. I did not give them berries, myself, in the old time; but the wintergreens lived near me, and the partridge berry covered a whole rock at my side, and in summer there were huckleberries enough to astonish you. I am sadly changed,’ said the Ground Pine, trying to stretch out his leaves; ‘I was so green and soft in those days, that I could wave about with the best of you. I am stiff enough now. How lovely the moss beds were! How sweetly they and I grew together! Go on,’ said the Ground Pine; ‘tell your stories. I have no heart to say more.’

“The Violets remarked that, for their part, they quite agreed with the Ground Pine. Nobody could love the moss beds and the deep shadows of the woods more than they did. To flowers accustomed to doing their work quietly and without notice, nothing could be less pleasant than the noise and glare and display which now surrounded them.

'But it is needful to maintain one's character in every situation,' added a Violet who stood up a little taller than the rest, 'and therefore we try to be as sweet as we can, even here. Even when we are dying and withered, you may know us for Violets still. We, like the Rose, are found all over the world; and while we always seek seclusion, are constantly brought into society. The old Romans flavoured their wine with our flowers, and the Turks put syrup of violets in their sherbet. Indeed, Mahomet has said that the extract of violets is as much above all other extracts as he was above all the rest of creation, which we consider a very small compliment indeed.'

"'We don't wish to be made into extracts,' said all the Violets together. 'Let us grow in the deep woods, with the shelter of our own green leaves. Come there to see us, and you shall have a sweeter perfume than can ever be bought for money.'"

CHAPTER XXV.

"THAT's not the only puzzle," said Prim. She was sitting on the rug upstairs now, in her little red dressing-gown. "I s'pose we ought to give things; don't you?"

"Give things? to the fair?" said Clover.

"Why, of course we ought," said Lily; "and we haven't got a thing. I told mamma so, and she said we might give what we had, or that we could make from what we had. So of course we can't do anything."

"Oh, but we must think," said Clover. "Do you suppose anybody would buy a seed box like yours, if I made it?"

"*They* don't keep seeds," said Lily. "And Mr. Stubbs must have whole bureaus for his, I should think."

"That must be true," said Clover. "Well, we can take some mignonette seed, in little bags. Pretty bags, you know."

"I have got petunia seed," said Lily. "'Mixed,' as Mr. Vick says."

"And *I've* got pansy and ipomea," said Prim. "And, O Clover! if you'd only paint the flowers on the bags! The right kind of flower, I mean, on every one. People would *have* to buy 'em, they'd be so pretty."

"I'm afraid not, if *I* painted the flowers," said Clover with a laugh.

"But we must put something on' em," urged Prim. "You could write 'Seeds of Mr. Vick's flowers.'"

"But they'll be seeds of ours, dear," said Clover.

"I'm sure his seeds brought the flowers," said Prim.

"Well," said Lily, "you can say, 'Seeds of flowers from Mr. Vick's seeds.'"

"So we can,—that's splendid," said Primrose.

"But, Lily," said Clover, "you know seed bags aren't very big, and I can't write very small. That's a great deal to put on them."

"We'll make Sam do it," said Lily conclusively. "He may as well help. I told him it wouldn't hurt him to make another hanging basket, just for the fair, you know. And he said he didn't mean that it should. Sam's real lazy sometimes."

"Oh! oh! oh!" cried Primrose. And "Oh! oh!

oh!" said Mrs. May, entering the room. "Little people who expect to go to fairs, must also go to bed."

So that ended all questions for the time. But next day, and every day, the work went on. Every spare minute was eagerly used up, and Mrs. May gave some of her prettiest coloured paper to make the bags. Sam shook his head a little at the lucid inscription, but was persuaded into writing it on every bag, nevertheless.

"Because, you see," said Lily, "if people don't understand it, we can tell 'em"—and then of course there was no more to be said. And the work was so interesting that only a very occasional thought of the black silks found room to creep in. Under persuasion, too, Jack had whittled out a few little packages of neat labels, so that at last even Lily was content.

"Of course, as it's a flower table," she said, "there must be everything proper and suitable. Only it's a great pity about the black silks."

"I don't see how three crows would be suitable at a flower table," said Jack: which put Primrose in a muse. Clearly, Mrs. Jarvis had not looked at the matter from this point of view.

"I think fairs are splendid!" Primrose said, when they were all tucked into the sleigh on the eventful morning, and jingling off very fast towards the scene

of action. "I wish somebody'd have one every week."

Poor Mrs. Jarvis!—certainly *she* would not wish to be the "somebody" very often. For of course the house was turned out of the windows—brown linen over the carpets, and half the greenhouse brought into the parlours, and not a table or chair in its usual place. But to all the younger eyes it was mere fairyland. Under crimson hangings, and between graceful palms and blooming azaleas, the children went softly in and along the hall to the little dressing-room, where they threw off their wraps, feeling quite too dazzled to make comments, or to speak at all except in whispers.

"Is my hair all tumbled up?" said Prim, under her breath; and Clover silently smoothed it down, and wondered where they were to go next.

At this point, however, Miss Maria came flying in, and relieved all perplexities. *She* was not in a subdued state of mind; the extremely flighty exhilaration of her spirits was perfectly represented in the gay ribbons, and streamers, and flowers which adorned her little person.

"Oh, here you are!" she said. "But what *have* you got on? Aprons! as sure as I live! And merino frocks!"

"Never mind," said Clover good-naturedly, though she too shared the feelings which made Lily and

Prim quite silent; "we're only saleswomen, you know. Mamma said she thought aprons would be very suitable."

"Well, there's something in that," said Miss Maria, accepting the idea.

"And Jack said three crows *wouldn't* be," said Prim.

"Wouldn't be what?" said Maria. "Three crows! Well, you are the oddest child! Say, girls, what have you brought?"

"Oh, ever so many things," said Lily, recovering her composure. "We've got seeds—flower seeds, you know, in little bags."

"And the bags are pink and blue and all sorts of colours—beautiful!" said Prim with round, eager eyes.

"Yes," said Lily, "mamma gave us some of her own paper, so it's first-rate; and Sam wrote the names. There's twelve petunia bags in pink, and six ipomeas in blue, and fourteen mignonettes in green. Each flower's got its own colour."

"What a pretty way!" said Miss Maria approvingly. "Now come along—are you ready? But didn't you bring anything but seeds?"

"I brought a pincushion," said Prim, "blue and orange. And mamma sent a cake."

"Oh, that's good," said Maria; "I wish it was in little cakes, and we'd have some right off. Come

along—we'll find Jane Simms. Do you know Jane?—here she is, arranging the workbags. She's got the workbag department. It's right next to yours, with the sugar plums 'tother side; because mamma said if people bought bags, they'd want to fill 'em, and if they bought things, they'd want to put 'em somewhere. Here's Jane. Oh, you don't know the Mays. Well, they stand right next to you here. Now, girls, I must go and receive people; and you must just arrange your tables, and make 'em as pretty as you can. William Stubbs is sick, so *he* can't do much."

Miss Maria fluttered off, and the children stood still and looked round the room. Bright colours everywhere. Loops of ribbon and little flags and gay flowers decked the walls and the windows, and the chandeliers and the mantelpiece. Most of the tables, too, were decked out and in order; only the workbag department looked still rather chaotic, and the flower table was as yet a blank. Nothing was there but a smooth, very white cloth. But close at hand, on the floor and in baskets, were quantities of material; cut flowers in heaps, little plants in pots, and quite a number of bouquets already made up, with moss and ground pine and little baskets. And all these were to be arranged on the table! The children were half out of their wits with delight.

"Here, that's for you," said Miss Maria, flying in

with rolls of wrapping paper and balls of twine; "and mamma says she wishes you flower girls would make up as many bouquets as you've time for. You see William Stubbs is sick. This paper's for you, Jane."

Make up bouquets, and of these exquisite hot-house flowers!—it was happiness enough to make any one sober. And very sober the children were, bending over their work, with bright eyes and flushed faces and fingers that even trembled with the joy. Prim dreamed over her bouquets, and finished one to Lily's six. And Clover was but little quicker, making up hers with infinite pains. And Lily tossed hers off—little knots of brilliancy that fell softly into the basket—as gaily and easily as the notes of a song came now and then trilling from her lips, for the room was empty yet. The ladies of the house were dressing, and guests had not come.

"You like to do that, don't you?" said Jane Simms, turning away from the bag department, which indeed looked rather dim by comparison, in spite of its yellow satin and black velvet and pink silk.

"Oh, it's *perfectly* delightful!" said Lily.

"I like flowers, too," said Jane. "I mean to buy some of your seeds. Are they good ones?"

"Why, they're Mr. Vick's," said Primrose; "at

least *ours* were, and then we saved these ourselves. Do you have bulbs too—hardy bulbs? We've had 'em all winter."

"Not many," said Jane. "I've got two hyacinths, but they haven't bloomed yet. I wonder if hyacinths ever bloom under ground?"

"Under ground?" said Lily.

"Why, what should they for?" said Primrose.

"I don't know," said Jane, "but one of mine, the blue one, is hardly a bit out of the ground, but I can see just a little speck of blue, as if it was opening down there."

"Oh, well, you want to coax it," said Clover. "Sam showed me how. One of mine did just so, and he twisted up a bit of paper—so—like a cornucopia, you know, and cut off the point, and put the large end down right over the spike."

"Inside the leaves?" said Jane.

"Inside the leaves. And when the flower found itself in the dark, it came up through the paper cone to find the light."

"How pretty!" said Jane. "What a nice brother you must have! I never have many bulbs; we aren't rich enough to buy amusements much, mother says. But I saw a whole box of bulbs that came from Mr. Vick, and it was just as pretty as it could be."

"Was it yours? tell us about it," said Lily.

"Oh, not mine," said Jane; "one of our neighbours had it. She's not rich, either, but Mr. Vick is always very kind to her, she says, and so I guess he packed it to suit himself."

"He sent us some snowdrops once," said Prim.

"Well," said Jane, "this box was just full. All across the top there was a whole layer of hyacinths — 'Queen Victoria,' and 'Lord Wellington,' and 'Lord Raglan,' and 'Mammoth,' and 'Kroon princess,' and I don't know what. And between the hyacinths were little white cones of paper, all sealed up and labelled, just stuck in, point down, and each one had a named ranunculus. There was 'Apple Blossom' and 'Orange Lion,' and all sorts of funny names."

"Oh," said Primrose, "Sam's got some too, but they haven't all flowered yet."

"Then there was a paper of single anemones," said Jane, "and a paper of double anemones, and another layer of hyacinths, and ever so many Polyanthus narcissus, and English iris, and Iris Hispanica, and a lily, and—Hush! here come the ladies!" and all the children jumped into place at once.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE children fell into place, and the ladies came in' rustling, waving, dazzling all eyes with the brightness of their colours and the inconvenience of their trains.

"Look!" said Primrose to her sage elder sister, "why did she want us to be three crows? Are they going to sell dark things, do you s'pose?" But Clover smiled and shook her head.

"We shall see," she said. "Maybe they're not going to sell at all, only to buy."

And so it appeared, for when Mrs. Jarvis had walked round the room, examining everything and giving directions, she came to the flower table and there stood still.

"Oh, the Misses May!" she said graciously. "Quite a picture, I declare. You have done vastly well. Did Stubbs help you?"

"William Stubbs is sick," said Miss Maria. "He said he wouldn't stir his head again for all the flower

tables in creation. And they didn't wear their black silks, because they haven't got any to wear. And their mother thought aprons would be suitable."

"Maria, hush! and mind your own affairs," said her mother. Then she turned to the three children, who stood blushing and somewhat discomfited behind their flowers. "Really a fine effect, my dears. So kind of you to take the trouble! What are these little bags?"

"Seeds, ma'am," said Clover, for Lily was too vexed to speak. "We thought perhaps some one might buy them."

"And every sort's got its own colour," said Primrose.

"What a pretty idea!" said Mrs. Jarvis. "If I ever bought flower seeds at all, I should certainly purchase some of these. Let me see,—yes, I want a bouquet to finish my dress."

Clover picked out the daintiest little breastknot she could find for Mrs. Jarvis, and then all the other ladies at once found out that *their* dresses were also in an unfinished condition, and every one came to the flower table and bought a bouquet, and paid two shillings for it. Clover served them gently and gravely, though a little hot flush lingered on her cheeks still, and then Miss Maria disposed of

a few sugar-plums. But when Jane Simms displayed the beauty of her workbags, the ladies only said—

“No, thank you, dear,” and smiled sweetly and passed on.

“Never mind, they’re not the only people in the world,” said Jane Simms philosophically; “I mean to clear my table, girls, I give you all notice.”

“Lily,” whispered Clover, bending down to where Lily had half hid herself behind the table, “come! don’t sit there. Help me make up some more bouquets. We shall want them at this rate.”

“I don’t care if we do.”

“Yes, but you must care,” said Clover. “We’re on honour, you know, to keep our table supplied.”

“So mean of her!” said Lily, disregarding the sweet sprigs which Clover held out. “People have no right to say such things.”

“But it was true,” said Clover. “So perhaps they have a right.

“She didn’t know it was true,” said Lily hotly. “We might have had fifty black silk dresses for all she could tell.”

“That would be hardly likely,” said Clover with

a little laugh; "but it doesn't matter, anyhow. Come, go to work both of you. There are more people coming in."

"It was just as mean as it could be," said Lily again, but she took up the flowers and began to twist and tie, though with none of the repose of the flowers—or the sweetness either—in her face.

By degrees a good many people came in—rich ladies who wanted bouquets, and school boys who wanted candy, and school girls who thought the workbags were even more delightful. Jane cleared her table, as she said. The flower heaps dwindled down to nothing, and Miss Maria's candy-boxes (with her own important assistance very freely given) were at last just boxes—and nothing more.

By this time Mrs. Jarvis left her station of duty, and began to walk round the room to see what was left. Then she bought three neat baskets from the flower table and went round the room again, buying up all sorts of pretty trifles, which she put in the baskets, until they were quite full. And so, when the afternoon sun sent in long bright rays to see the progress of affairs, the fair was ended, and but little left on hand.

Then came dinner, best of all, according to Miss

Maria, and Mrs. Jarvis praised and complimented and said pretty things. And Lily still rode her high horse a little, and Prim was tired, and Clover had to do duty for all the three. And then at last (really "best of all") came Sam and the sleigh, and away they jingled through the young moonlight towards home, each child with one of the three full baskets held fast in her hand.

"I think Mrs. Jarvis was very kind," said Prim, breaking silence. "There's a leaf-cutter in mine, Lily; I saw it sticking out."

"She's well enough," said Lily shortly.

"And how is our dear, beloved, precious darling, Miss Maria?" inquired Jack from the box.

"Hush!" said Lily. Jack whistled a little, and raised his eyebrows, and "hushed." Then there was a long pause.

"Sam, dear," said little Prim's grave, childish voice, "what does the Bible mean about lilies?"

"About lilies?" said Sam, coming out of his muse. "Why, different things in different places, I suppose, Prim. In one place it tells about a lily among thorns."

"Well, that's *our* lily, I suppose," said Prim innocently. "But I mean, Sam, where it says they don't spin."

"‘Consider the lilies,’" said Sam, "'which without toiling or spinning, are far better dressed than even Solomon in all his glory.'"

"Yes, that's the place," said Prim. "But I don't understand it, Sam, dear."

"What's the difficulty?"

"You see," said Prim, going back of the difficulty, "it's the rich people that look so splendid, Sam."

"Well," said Sam, "what then?"

"And I thought that was said to poor people," said Primrose, knitting her brows in the darkness.

"We're not poor people," said Lily.

"But we're not such lilies as the Jarvises," said Jack.

"Hush," Lily said again. "Papa could buy us fifty black silks if he'd a mind to—as I said."

"I hope you did not say it in anybody's hearing," said Sam.

"Why not?"

"Silly!" said Sam, touching up his horses.

"What does it mean, Sam, dear?" little Primrose repeated.

"If the Lord had bid us look at some plain flower—mignonette, for instance—would you understand it better?" said Sam.

"*I* should," said Clover. "It's puzzled me a great many times."

"The Lord wants us, I think, in the first place, to understand that His power is equal to anything," said Sam. "He makes the lilies what they are; of course He *could* make all flowers equally splendid if He chose."

"Then He could make us all very rich people," said Lily.

"Of course, if He chose."

"I don't understand one bit," said Primrose. "What should we consider the lilies for, except because they're so pretty."

"If the Lord can do that for a flower, He can also do it for us. That is the first thing. But then, Prim, if He gives the lily its brilliant red, and yet leaves the snowdrop in white and the mignonette in green, it is because, for them, these colours are best. Not because He *could* not give them red robes too."

"It's more suitable, I s'pose," said Prim. "Like our aprons."

"Prim," said Lily, "if you say that again"——

"Hush, hush!" said Sam; "what is all this about? Is somebody discontented with her dress? It is time to consider the lilies and some other flowers, too, I think."

"But she's considered 'em too much," said Primrose. "She's just looked at petunias all summer!"

"Discontented with what has been chosen for her?" said Sam.

"No, Sam," said Lily, half crying; "but papa *could* get us better things if he would."

"Some people," said Sam, "have a great deal of money. And some others have also besides the money, sense. I really think these last have the best of it."

"But Lily would like a silk dress too," said Prim. "Why, Sam, Maria had ten flounces—I counted 'em. And earrings. And it was all pink silk."

"The lilies of the field," said Sam, "the flowers of the field, of whatever sort, are dressed according to the Lord's wise choice and loving care for them. But the mignonette is contented, and the violet is happy; and clover has honey enough all the day long."

"I think she does," said Primrose affectionately. "That's true. But, Sam, wasn't it *very* rude of Maria Jarvis?"

"There was once," said Sam, "a wise man who told his children, 'Let the question be always, not of your rights and other people's duties, but of your duties, and other people's rights.'"

"Yes," said Prim, "I s'pose that's best. And Clover said she had a right to say it, as it was true. And, O Sam, dear! there's a leaf-cutter—a new one—in my new basket! And I'm so glad."

Sam let his horses walk slowly up a long hill, and then he began a story.

"I once saw a little girl who had nothing pretty about her, except the back of her head. Her face was cross, and her shoulders were sullen, and her voice was just a perpetual fret. I believe her eyes were blue and full-sized, but you could hardly tell (they were always crying, or making believe cry), and her mouth was pretty, when it was not in a pout, and her cheeks were smooth and rosy when they were not all wrinkled up because her new frock did not please her, or washed down with salt tears because her apron was blue and not green. But as some such misfortune was always on hand, there never was anything pretty about her but the back of her head. *That* was fair and curly, and looked as if it belonged to a dear little child. I used to like to have her on my lap and sing to her, with the back of her head towards me, and the little face quite out of sight.

"I think she was a sort of a thistle, for the thistle, you know, is all over prickles from top to toe, except just in the little purple centre of its flowers. The

thistle said, 'Well, I cannot help having prickles—if you do not like them, keep out of my way. If people would let me alone, I shouldn't scratch and prick and sting.' So it grew up in the meadows, keeping just so much ground from the sweet grass, and every now and then sent off a handful of seeds on the wings of the wind, and thus in a little time it had planted the whole field with thistles as rude and sharp as itself.

"And this was the work the thistle did in the world."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AMONG the excitements of the winter was one which came the very next week after Mrs. Jarvis's fair. Flowers on the three stands were not very plenty just now—some hyacinths were out of bloom, and others not in; Ne Plus Ultra crocus declined to hurry itself, and Cloth of Gold had done its duty, and the last of its lovely little blossoms had dropped down and faded among its green leaves.

"And now the leaves grow faster than ever, just as if they were glad!" said Primrose.

But one could not put mere green leaves upon the breakfast table—leaves of crocuses out of bloom; and so the table had been flowerless for three whole mornings. Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, the little mat had been in place, and the three pot covers had stood on a side table waiting; but no flower pots appeared.

But when Tuesday morning came, and the children danced in to breakfast, a fine new pot cover

stood on the mat, and within it a flower pot full of wonders.

"O—h! what is it?" cried Primrose, with a long-drawn breath of delight; and "What is it?" "Where could it come from?" said everybody else—or almost everybody.

"It's a plant with all sorts of different coloured flowers!" cried Prim in her ecstasy.

"And it smells just like violets!" said Clover, taking the sweet breath at a distance.

"I dare say Maria Jarvis sent it to me," said Lily.

"Don't you wish she had?" said Jack scornfully; "don't you wish *you* could raise such flowers?"

"But we didn't know there were such flowers in the world before," said Clover.

"Upon my word, that is handsome!" said Mr. May as he took his seat. "There certainly must be a gardener among us. Which of you is it? This is the finest thing we have had this winter.

"It's Sam," said Jack briefly.

"Sam!" cried all the children. "O Sam! where *did* you get it?"

"Look here," said Sam, stretching his hand back to the table for the catalogue, which never lay far out of sight, "there it is: 'Ranunculus, named, ten cents apiece; Ranunculus, unnamed, twenty-five cents a dozen.'"

"Oh, is that ranunculus?" said the children once more, in concert.

"But I never thought of trying *them*," said Lily; "he just says they're uncertain."

"Oh, he says a great deal more than that," said Clover.

"Well, he says *that*, anyhow," said Lily, "and so I let 'em alone."

"Like a wise child," said Mr. May. "Uncertain people should always keep to certain things."

Lily pouted just a little.

"Papa," she said, "if I am wise, how can I be uncertain?"

"Wise in spots, as that ranunculus has its colour," said Mr. May, laughing. "Feast your eyes upon that, my dear, and leave difficult questions."

Well, the pot of ranunculus was certainly a joy in the house. Such exquisite, soft, full balls of colour — such variety, such perfume! Sam had planted three or four roots in the same pot, and now the green leaves mingled, and the flowers set each other off.

"It's better than Cloth of Gold," said Primrose. "O Sam! do you think it will be better than Blue Flag too?"

"Blue Flag will fill its place, I have no doubt, when it comes."

"I wish it would come," said Lily; "I do think bulbs are the very slowest things!"

" 'Slow and sure,
Success secure,
And be not over quick,' "

said Jack, quoting Original Poems.

"And hardy bulbs would be only foolhardy if they ventured out yet," said Mr. May; "they must wait, like you."

"Dear me!" said Lily, "there's so much waiting in this world! I wish things could be finished off quick and done with it."

"Everything that is worth having is worth waiting for," said Mrs. May; and with that Lily was obliged to be content.

"Mamma," said Primrose, "don't plants ever get tired waiting?"

"Out under the snow? No, I think not—unless the snow lies *very* long."

"I didn't mean out under the snow," said Prim, "but here, in the house. One of my geraniums looks just as tired as can be—as tired as I am."

"Tired as you are!" said her father, stooping down to kiss the little fresh cheek, as he left the

table. "What are you tired of, Prim? 'Tired of play—tired of play?' Is that it?"

"Oh no, papa; I don't play much," said Prim, with the grave dignity of her years. "But it's a great while to wait till spring, papa."

Mr. May gave a kiss to the other cheek. "A great while to wait till spring?" he said. "Why, it is spring all the time!" and so he went away, and Sam walked over to the window to look at the sick geranium.

"It don't grow," said Primrose; "and it looks tired, as if it couldn't."

Her brother studied the case a little, examined the plant, then lifted the pot and looked closely at the small hole in the bottom.

"It is pot-bound, I think," he said.

"What in the world do you mean by 'pot-bound'?" said Lily.

"Hungry and miserable. In the state Jack would be, if he had eaten all his breakfast and could get no dinner."

"Well, you're the *very* queerest boy I ever saw," said Lily.

"Mamma said," quoth little Primrose, "that she thought a *little* fasting might do Jack good."

"You shut up!" said Jack. "Mamma meant, of

course, fasting from exercise. I *have* skated rather hard this week, that's a fact."

"Not to speak of apple pie," said Lily.

"But about the geranium," said Clover.

"Yes, about the geranium. See," said Sam, putting his left hand over the top of the pot and turning it deftly upside down; "see, the roots are crowded and want room." He took off the pot, leaving the ball of earth entire in his hand. And to be sure, the earth was covered on every side with little white roots, which had even tried to make their way out through the hole in the bottom of the pot.

"But what must I do?" said Prim. "There won't a bit more earth go in the pot, Sam, dear. It is just as full as it can hold."

"Fuller than it can hold safely," said Sam; "the plant wants room. Whenever the little white roots begin to creep out at the bottom of the pot in that way, the plant needs repotting. Get a pot just one size larger than this, put a very little earth at the bottom, and then turn out the ball of earth unbroken, and set it carefully in the middle of the new pot. Fill in fresh earth round the sides, and give the pot a smart set down or two, to firm the earth, and then water the geranium, and put it back in its place quite happy."

Prim tried to follow out these instructions to the letter, and it took her all the afternoon, for of course the morning went to lessons. But she was not proud of her success. The pot was heavy and Prim's hands small. Instead of staying nicely poised upon her outspread little fingers the treacherous ball of earth gave way, hiding Prim's fingers with an avalanche of soft mould, and leaving the geranium more destitute than ever in her hand. Worse than all, an unsuspected earthworm had taken up winter quarters among the geranium roots; and now, finding himself somewhat rudely shaken, put forth first his head and then his whole length, to see what was the matter. Prim dropped plant and all into her pan of earth, and gazed in silent dismay.

"I never saw such things!" said Primrose at last, in her disgust. "Ugh! What *shall* I do? Jack! O Jack, please come here a minute."

Jack was just passing through the hall, skates in hand, but he did not often fail his little sister in time of need.

"Well, little lady—what now?" he said, looking in at the door. "Come to grief, hey? Never mind—the muss isn't extensive."

"O Jack!" said Primrose, "won't you *please* take this earthworm away? It's right in the earth, and I don't know what to do."

"You don't expect earthworms to be right in the water, I s'pose," said Jack, coming towards the scene of action. "Where should he be? Hi! *ain't* that a fellow of longitude! Call *that* an earthworm? Why, it's a young serpent." And Jack seized the earthworm by the tail and swung him before Prim's horrified eyes.

"Oh, don't! oh, don't!" she cried. "Take it away! *please*, Jack."

"Best look out for the other, first," said Jack. "Snakes always go in pairs. Let's lay him down on the carpet, and have a hunt for Mrs. Snake, and all the young Snakeses."

"O Jack, *please* don't!" pleaded Primrose. "*Please* take it away! There couldn't be another in this pot—there wasn't room."

"What shall I do with him?" said Jack. "The ground's as hard as a brickbat."

"Put him in the snow, then," said Primrose.

"In the snow!" said Jack. "Put your enemies in the snow, to freeze to death slowly."

"It needn't freeze slowly," said Primrose.

"Well!" said Jack. "If gardening hardens people's hearts like that! She wants him to freeze fast!"

"Well, put it in the ground, then," said Primrose

"I'm sure you *could* dig a hole somewhere, Jack, if you would."

"I might clear away the snow from your garden," said Jack, meditating—"and dig a hole there, with a pickaxe, and put him in. Then he'd be all ready for you next spring."

"Ah, Jack!" said Primrose—and then Jack heard his mother's step, and darted away, taking the earthworm with him, and leaving Primrose to repot her geranium, with many shivers of apprehension and disgust running over her the while. But she found no more earthworms, and the geranium grew and flourished; and slowly but surely the spring came on.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I SUPPOSE there is nothing in the whole universe of things much sweeter than the first approaches of spring. The indescribable scent and quality of the air, the tenderer blue of the sky, so changed from the hard January glitter! The stir of sounds in the pine trees, by the river edge, in the air! To hear the blue bird's flourish, and the phoebe's call, and note how the sparrows—all out of practice—tune, and try, and tune again, getting their voices by degrees! To be sure it is only February,—spring has not stepped over the borders,—but you hear the rustle and feel the stir and catch the perfumes none the less.

It was late in February now, and spring was indeed close at hand; but the three busy children were so busy that they had almost forgotten their watch. So busy just now with seeds and seed boxes, that for the time no one thought much of the bulbs in their garden bed.

Then when March really came, snow came too, and the world was all white again,—and the snow birds rejoiced, and the song sparrows endured, and the phoebes stopped talking.

“Mamma,” said Primrose, “I think the birds must be very unhappy. Mamma, I shouldn’t think God would let the snow come and worry them so!”

“Worry them!” Mrs. May repeated, smiling; “‘not one of them is forgotten before God.’ Open the window, Prim, and hear what they say about it.”

Prim opened the window and listened. The air had grown soft again, though the earth was still white in places, and such a talk as went on out of doors was worth hearing. Prim hardly dared breathe lest she should interrupt it.

First, there was her own favourite little red bantam cock, crowing about twice a minute—as near as Prim could guess; then a large grey hen and a small yellow one were comparing notes as to the relative size and value of the eggs they had just laid. The dispute waxed louder and louder, and the white cock (who should have known better) put in his word and just made matters worse. All that was a little way off.

Nearer by the two phœbes were building diligently on a rafter of the piazza roof, calling to each other at the top of their gentle voices.

"Phœ-be! I want some mud."

"Phœ-be! I've found a feather."

Or sometimes perhaps—

"Phœ-be—be—be! why don't you come?"

Clear and sweet the blue bird uttered his glad music; the robins talked so fast that you couldn't catch a word; and high up overhead a wild cry floated down from the last string of wild geese, just in from the Arctic Ocean. Nor was this all. Prim heard, in the pauses, the frogs—even the frogs—piping away in the joy of their hearts. The child turned round with a sort of ecstasy in her face.

"Mamma," she said, "it's just like music, everywhere! And I'm *sure* my bulbs must want to be up!"

"Wrong for once, little sister," said Sam, coming in as she spoke.

"O Sam! do you think they *don't* want to?" said Primrose, disappointed.

"Suppose we go down and see," said Sam. "I made a discovery this morning."

"Oh, did you?" said Primrose, running for her cloak and hood, and eagerly putting them on. "You

didn't find that earthworm Jack said he'd put in my garden?"

"Earthworms! no, not at this time of year," said Sam. "But you know how the wind has blown for the last two days?"

"Yes, well?" said Primrose. "It blew one of my gloves away yesterday, I know that."

"And almost took you with it," said Sam. "Well, it also blew away part of the brown blanket that covered your bulbs."

"Oh! oh!" said Primrose, hurrying along. "That is too, too bad!"

- "No, indeed," said her brother. "You must never call anything too bad, until you have got beyond it and seen both sides. And then you will very seldom say that."

"Whereabouts is the blanket torn?" said Primrose, trying to speak cheerfully, but feeling very bad nevertheless. "You know I promised papa a dark blue King William."

"Over the crocuses that were so fast asleep."

"Dear, dear!" said Primrose, "I should think it would wake them up, Sam. It does *me* when the blanket gets off."

"Well, so it does the crocuses," said Sam, smiling; "they are as wide awake as you are. And I should

not wonder if the hyacinths thought it was time to be up too."

"Why, you don't mean?" said Primrose, stopping short and gazing at him.

And then she dropped Sam's hand and set off for the garden as fast as her feet could carry her. Round one path and down another, over bits of frozen earth and patches of late snow and little wet spots where the sun had taken hold, away went Prim. The little feet sped lightly along, the little red cloak flew back upon the wind, and the hood dropped down upon her shoulders, and when Sam's longer and steadier steps had brought him to the side of the small garden, Prim was standing with rapt eyes and folded hands in a maze of silent delight.

The wind certainly had played pranks. Quiet enough the brown blanket had lain all winter, so long as the white blanket tucked it snugly in, but now the brush was tossed and twisted about, and some bits of it thrown off on the grass, and some carried quite down to the fence. Then, where the brush was off, the sun had shone right down upon the brown leaves, melting the ice which held them fast, and now the wind had swept even these away, and one corner of Prim's little garden lay bare, the earth uncovered and open to the sky. And there!

—but how shall I describe what was there? I called the place bare and uncovered, but instead of that it was more beautiful than anybody could tell; for little tufts of crocuses and snowdrops had already pushed their way up, and stood waiting to be loved. The snowdrops were even in bloom, hanging their pale, delicate heads, that waved with every least breath of air. The crocuses, little stiff, sturdy tufts of leaves, but half up as yet, among which the gay round heads of flower buds came pushing their way. Cloth of Gold was there with a true golden cap, and Pigeon in white, and King William in the darkest purplish blue, while one adventurous yellow crocus had even got ahead of the rest, and stood looking, open-eyed, up to the sun. "The buttercup catches the sun in its chalice." So also did this crocus.

If Sam had not been there, Primrose would surely have gone down on her knees by the bed, quite forgetful of snow specks and lingering ice. As it was, she only clasped and unclasped her hands, and stood silent—and at last looked up with absolutely tears in her eyes.

"O Sam! it's too good to be true."

"Not 'too bad' now," said her brother, smiling. "'Too bad' very often turns into 'too good,' Prim."

"Does it?" said Primrose. "O Sam! I *wish* I could peep under another corner and see what's there!"

"You may do better than that. You may take the blanket all off; it is quite time now."

"All off?—the whole bed?" said Primrose eagerly.

"All off the whole bed. Run and fetch your little rake, and I will begin to throw off the brush."

Primrose ran for her rake, and by the time she came back the brush was all off the bed, and piled together in a great heap.

"Now we must go softly, softly," said Sam, "so as neither to hurt the young shoots nor to disturb the labels. See, Prim; gather off the loose upper leaves first with your hands—so."

"Do you think there are young shoots?" said Prim, beginning to draw off the faithful brown leaves which had done duty all winter. "You must get them off the middle of the bed, Sam, dear, and I'll work round the edge of the bed, as far as I can reach."

Primrose worked and worked; first the loose leaves, then those that were packed down closer, then—

"O Sam!—what *is* that?" she cried, starting up.

"That" was a large brown leaf, or rather two or three in a packet, right through which came a long green shoot of something. It had pierced through the leaves, and now bore them affectionately round its neck into the upper air.

"Ah!" said Sam, coming to look, "I thought so. That is a tulip tired of waiting."

"Dear, dear!" said Primrose again, "I'm very sorry it had to wait. But, Sam, it don't seem ready to let the blanket go, after all."

"That is the blanket's fault," said Sam. "The dead leaves are tough and strong, and the young shoot is yet but weak. It is starving for air and light. Look!" And he carefully came to the help of the tulip, and took off the useless shred of its brown blanket. "There, that is better."

"But it looks a little pinched," said Primrose, crouching down to survey the tulip.

"Things in a hurry do sometimes get pinched," said Sam. "Now carefully, carefully, Prim."

Carefully, carefully they worked on, drawing off the brown leaves. Sometimes with light touches of the rake, sometimes with gentle fingers, and then discoveries began in earnest.

"Why, everything is up!" Primrose cried at last, and so it seemed. The hyacinth shoots had burst their covering of earth, some quite up in

sight, some just coming through; great heads of flower buds, each set in a little circle of leaf points.

"But what makes them all so yellow?" asked Prim.

"They have been in the dark, you know," said Sam; "they will be all right after a few days' sunshine."

"O Sam, dear!" cried little Primrose, almost trembling with delight, "look! This one's white already! And this one's red. And here's a blue, and a yellow, and another white. Look, Sam, all the buds are green except just one or two at the very top; and here are some more that are green everywhere. And here are my dear little labels! And oh! *do* look at the tulips!—*aren't* they funny? Just two leaves and a little green bud, 'way, 'way down, 'most out of sight!"

There was no measuring the pleasure of that afternoon. Clover and Lily were off on some long expedition, and so Sam and his little sister had it all out by themselves. The leaves were all carefully gathered off, the labels tightened, for many were a little thrown out and loose; and then Sam showed Primrose how to dress the earth between the bulbs—smoothing it with the little hoe and rake of her "floral set," and leaving the bed all dressed and

smiling, in the full bright promise of its spring beauty.

"But, Sam," said Primrose suddenly, stopping short in her work, "why did you say I was wrong when I said they wanted to be up?"

"Because they are up!" said Sam, smiling at her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN the midst of all the sweet spring work, in the midst of all the deep spring pleasure, there came one drawback—Clover fell ill.

Some other drawbacks there had been from time to time, looking very slight now in the light of this, but considered extremely serious when they came. One tulip curled and crinkled down and refused to grow. One hyacinth—La Perouse—in the very height of its blue beauty, was picked by some one during the night, proving, as Sam said, that the love of flowers could not of itself reform people. Then a stray cow dashed in through an open gate, and trampled Yellow Prince into the mud: and even the old house dog must put his paw in the matter, and could find no better place for his bone than close in between the Duchess of Richmond and Mars himself. The children mourned and scolded and wondered—and after all were consoled; but Clover's illness was quite another affair.

"Just when her garden is looking the very prettiest!" cried Primrose, with tears in her eyes.

"Just when there are seeds to plant, and seedlings to put out, and everything in the world to do!" said Lily.

"Just when it's getting mild, and Mr. Vick may send the gladioluses any day!" thought Jack. For by dint of severe economy in candy and slate-pencils, Jack had saved up his pocket money and invested in gladiolus roots to the extent of three.

"I don't see why people are let get sick," Lily went on, digging away with half-vexed energy.

"I s'pose God thinks it's best," said Primrose, bending over her larkspur seeds with a solemn face.

"Well, I don't see how He can," said Lily. "They can't do anything. And at this time of year there's more than everything to do," said Lily, as with the care of a hundred acres.

"Of course *we'll* plant her garden," said Prim, ignoring the deeper questions.

"We've got our own to plant," said heated Lily, digging away at a tough corner. "And then maybe she won't like it; she's such a fuss."

"O Lily!" cried Primrose.

"Well, what? I'm as sorry she's sick as you are, but that don't hinder her being a fuss. Much thanks I'd get if I put petunias all over her garden."

"Well, I shouldn't think you would," said Primrose severely; "I shouldn't think you'd get any at all; and I don't think you'd deserve one."

"One thank," said Lily, laughing in derision. "You see it isn't as if it was just the old gardens, Prim," she went on presently. "Now we've got two apiece of our own, and *you* can't do much."

"I can do a little," said Primrose.

"Precious little. You know Clover helped you all the time last summer."

"I know she did," said Primrose, the tears overflowing this time. "She never minded her own garden one bit when I wanted anything. O Lily! do you think God will let her die?"

"Why, do hush!" said Lily, rather startled. "I never saw such a child! She's not so very sick, I guess. She says she isn't, anyway."

"Maybe she don't know," said Primrose with a heavy sigh.

"I don't know who should if she don't," said Lily. "Very odd that would be. I bet you if *I* was going to die I'd know it, faster than anybody."

"But I wish you wouldn't talk so, Lily!" said

poor little Prim, feeling as if the earth was somehow going to pieces all around her.

"Well, you began it," said Lily; "I don't want to talk about it, I'm sure." And Lily went at her work with a fierce energy, which would have told any grown-up spectator that her heart was really as full as Prim's. But Prim's young eyes made nothing of it; she *almost* thought Lily hard-hearted.

"I think you're like Job's friends," she said with some dignity.

"Very likely," said Lily, swallowing her trouble. "I'm rather too busy to sit down as Job did."

Now it was true that Primrose had dropped her trowel some minutes ago, and had ever since been sitting disconsolately on the edge of the wheelbarrow, seed-bag in hand; but at this little hint she jumped up immediately.

"Job was a rich man, and had nothing to do," she said, with some natural indignation.

"Three reasons why I shall never be Job," said Lily, piling sticks and stones upon the vacated wheelbarrow.

"A rich man and nothing to do—that's only two reasons," said Prim.

"Look sharp, and you'll find three," answered Lily. "You see, Prim, Clover's garden must be

just all full of flowers as it can hold, when she comes down to see it the first time. I wish we knew what *she'd* plant."

"There's her seeds," suggested Primrose.

"So they are, that's true," said Lily. "And there are all her plants in the stand."

"Jack takes care of *them*," said Primrose. "O Lily! what'll become of the hanging baskets all summer?"

"Sam said part of them, at least mamma's, could hang in the piazza," said Lily. "O Prim! I'll tell you what we'll do!—we'll put a great basket right in the very middle of Clover's bed."

"Oh, while she's there?" said Primrose, opening her eyes.

"Don't be a little goose!" said Lily impatiently; "I mean here, child, in her garden. And then we'll fill it with hanging plants, and one great, great tall beauty in the centre; and then when Clover sees it, she won't know what to do."

"I know what she'll do," said Primrose: "she'll laugh, and she'll half cry, and she'll get lovely pink cheeks. O Lily! *don't* you wish you could see her cheeks pink again?"

"Of course I do," said Lily; "but that's not business. We'll have plenty to do, I can tell

you, without wishing. Now where shall we ever get a basket that'll be tall enough?"

"Sam will make one," cried Primrose, clasping her hands. "Oh, I know he will! And we'll ask him this very minute."

Certainly no more splendid plan could have been thought of. And now the gardens ran some risk of being neglected for the pure pleasure of watching Sam. It was a very funny basket, as Primrose said.

First of all, Sam brought a large old stump of a tree full of knots and squirrel holes and strange twists. This he set up firmly, not in the centre of the bed, but on the smooth turf near by. Because it would be less easy to keep the plants watered and in order if one had to reach over the heads of other flowers, he explained to the children, and besides, it would take up too much of the dug ground, and would look better on the grass. The next thing was to dig out the basket. The stump was large, and cut smoothly across the top, and now Sam brought his chisel and hammer and began to hollow out the space he wanted in the very stump itself.

"But I should think you'd just nail a basket on it," said Lily.

"This will look much prettier," said Sam, "and

the thick walls of the stump will keep the earth moist and cool."

"It'll be fine, I guess," said Lily, looking on for a while. "But I haven't a minute to spare—there's the world and his wife to do," and Lily rushed off to her work. Little Primrose stood still.

"Sam, dear," she said softly, "*why* do you think God lets people get sick—just when there's so much to do, as Lily says?"

Sam laughed a little. "If they had to wait for a leisure time, Prim, some people would *never* get sick."

"Well," said Primrose. *She* could bear that. "But while they are sick they can't do anything, Sam."

"Think not, little sister?" said Sam, kissing her.

"No," said Primrose; "of course they can't. And I thought God always wanted people to do something."

"That is much my own opinion," said Sam, making the chips fly. "Prim, I wonder if you and Lily can help me here for a few minutes."

"Oh yes, I'm sure we can," said Prim, running to call Lily. She came rushing up, well pleased at a change of work.

"What is it, Sam? Want me to go on chipping, while you do something else?"

"Not exactly," said Sam. "Don't you touch my 'chipping,' as you call it, under all sorts of penalties. There—take your trowel and draw the earth a little from under this root while I raise it up; so. Now put about as much here in this place. And now you may bring me a basket of moss you will find in the tool room."

Lily went and came, brought moss and picked up chips, and was very busy and merry, and still Sam gave Primrose nothing to do. She looked wistfully at Lily's busy hands, she glanced up at Sam's face, and once the tears even came into her eyes.

"He's forgotten all about me," she thought, with a smothered sob. "He won't let me help!" Then Primrose chided herself severely. "It's only because there's nothing I can do, maybe—Sam *wouldn't* forget me," she said to herself; "and he hasn't either," she went on, "for he's smiled at me twice." And Primrose looked up again, with a little bit of a smile—which was wholly sweet and patient and trustful—on her own face, whereupon Sam stooped down and kissed her instantly.

"My dear, patient little darling!" he said. "Did you think I had forgotten you, Prim?"

"No," said Primrose with a sigh of relief,—

quite, Sam. Almost, I guess." And with that, Sam at once gave her so much to do, that Prim was kept on the jump. She packed the earth neatly and smoothly round the base of the great stump, she gathered up the chips; and finally Sam mounted her in the wheelbarrow and let her line the basket-hollow with moss. Meanwhile Prim's thoughts were busy.

"Sam, dear," she said at last, "was *that* what you meant?"

"When?" said Sam, laughing at her.

"When you let me stand and wait and wait, and do nothing."

"Ay," said Sam—

"They also serve, who only stand and wait—"

I wanted to see if you would trust me, Prim,—if you were willing to do *just* what I wished."

"I see!" said Primrose gravely. "*That* was the way you wanted me to please you."

"Precisely."

"But, Sam," Prim began again, after a pause, "*you* smiled at me."

Something came up in Sam's eyes.

"And if you go and ask Clover, little one," he said, "she will tell you that the Lord smiles at her every day."

I may not stop to tell you all that was said and done about this time. The moss-lined stump basket was filled with rich earth, and ivy geraniums and "Wandering Jew" and German ivy were planted around the edge.

Other beautiful plants—a begonia, a pilea and a fuchsia—came next, while the centre was filled with a tall crimson achyranthes. And by the time all was ready, Clover was almost well again, and the very first day she went down to her garden, there stood Blue Flag in all his glory !

THE END.



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